

Why the Bush Doctrine Failed: And How an Inadequate Understanding of Liberal Democracy and the Islamic Resurgence Continues to Cripple U.S. Foreign Policy

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BOSTON COLLEGE

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Department of Political Science

WHY THE BUSH DOCTRINE FAILED

*AND HOW AN INADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND THE
ISLAMIC RESURGENCE CONTINUES TO CRIPPLE U.S. FOREIGN POLICY*

a dissertation

by

JONATHAN WILLIAM PIDLUZNY

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2012

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2012

ABSTRACT

WHY THE BUSH DOCTRINE FAILED

And How an Inadequate Understanding of Liberal Democracy and the Islamic Resurgence Continues to Cripple U.S. Foreign Policy

Jonathan William Pidluzny
Dr. Dennis Hale, chair

This dissertation aims to evaluate the utility of democracy promotion in the Middle East to U.S. foreign policy; in particular, it asks why the Arab-Islamic world has proven uniquely resistant to liberal democracy. The overall argument is that an inadequate theoretical understanding of our own regime and its prerequisites led American policy makers simultaneously to expect too much of democratization, and to think too little of liberal democracy. We overestimated its promise, believing transforming key regimes could, in a cost effective manner, bring peace and prosperity to the Middle East, and in the long term help root out terrorist acts committed in the name of Islam. One of the reasons for this: policymakers underestimated what liberal democracy requires of its citizenry—deeply ingrained beliefs and social practices that are acquired only with difficulty. In Iraq, the Bush administration failed to appreciate that long established opinions and *mores* establish boundaries that constrain political action.

Part I begins by giving an account of the assumptions and deliberations that led the Bush administration to pursue regime change in Iraq. It goes on to demonstrate by concrete examples drawn from the occupation period, the insurgency period, and the period since (characterized by utterly dysfunctional and increasingly authoritarian politics), that the

rights and privileges associated with democracy—free and fair elections, new liberties, even the constitutional convention itself—are often used in illiberal ways, as weapons to serve narrow and self-interested factions, where the citizenry has not internalized a liberal political consciousness.

Part II argues that a rare political personality—largely separable from any particular national character—accounts for the confluence of political liberalism and democratic institutions in the North Atlantic states. Our gentle and tolerant politics are the result of a series of revolutions in social consciousness that have not occurred in the Islamic world. In fact, the Islamic Resurgence of the last century, a revolution as consequential as the French or American Revolutions, is the consequence of a conscious project dedicated to popularizing guiding opinions that are deliberately inhospitable to political liberalism. Analysis of leading Islamist thinkers in the Sunni and Shiite world demonstrates the extent to which they have been successful in erecting barriers to modern and moderate government in the Middle East, which they reject as unjust and corrupting. The dissertation concludes by arguing that Turkey succeeded at establishing a *mixed* regime by emulating, so far as possible under its own circumstances, the conditions that made the emergence of liberal democracy possible in the West.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I began my time at Boston College, I imagined I would finish my Ph.D. in four years. Four years—altogether. Instead, it has taken me that long just to write this dissertation. I would not give up these last years for anything. In spite of the many frustrations, setbacks, and anxieties, they have been the most intellectually rewarding—and demanding—of my life.

To spend so much time studying, more or less absolved of the business of making a living in some ordinary way, is a rare privilege. In my case, there are many people and organizations to thank for affording me the opportunity and for helping me to make the best of it. This project would not have been possible without generous research support from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Political Science Department at Boston College, summer graduate student funding from the Ernest Fortin Foundation and the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, as well as the liberal support (and generous patience)—in too many ways to name—of my Associate Deans (past and present) at Morehead State University: Dr. Michael Hail and Dr. Stephen Lange.

I received more indulgence, more leeway, more encouragement, and more substantive guidance from my dissertation committee than is common or deserved. Dr. Dennis Hale's response to my initial (failed) attempt to articulate the problem this dissertation finally took up guided and structured four long years of research. I wanted to determine

why the war and ensuing effort to promote democracy in Iraq—an endeavor I supported with youthful, if altogether unexamined, enthusiasm—seemed to be failing. But I did not know how to ask the question, nor even where to begin my attempt to investigate it. This project *is* the consequence of my attempt to answer Dr. Hale’s enlightening and more manageable questions. In fact, the manuscript grew out of an email reply—which had run to 100 pages before I moved it into a Word document (ultimately to become a first draft)—to his first, very thorough and pointed, criticisms (not all of which have been answered satisfactorily, even to this day). If it would often take me months, even a year, to submit new work in response to guidance and criticism, Dr. Hale would reply within hours or days, providing encouragement and further commentary well beyond what I deserved. This project would not have been possible absent his generosity and insight. Drs Behnegar and Crawford often read very long portions of this project, and on very short notice. I am grateful for that support, and more even, for the substance of their thoughtful criticisms. They saved me from simplistic generalizations, directed me in fruitful directions, and by their pointed criticisms helped me to add depth and nuance to my argument; their comments and insights have found their way into these pages throughout, and have improved my dissertation very much.

In addition to my committee, the intellectual footprints of three other teachers will be discerned on every page. I owe the best ideas and clearest insights to those who have taken the time to help me learn. In addition to Drs Hale, Behnegar and Crawford, I owe profound debts of gratitude to Drs Craig, Studer and Bruell. They taught me more than I would have imagined there is to know about politics, and have equipped me for a

lifetime of learning. I am especially indebted to Drs Craig and Studer for ripping me, at age 18, from my youthful relativism, and for introducing to me the joys and possibilities of political philosophy—while always emphasizing the importance of practical politics. I am not sure a better education exists than the one I have been fortunate to enjoy.

Somehow, my parents helped to form in me that strange amalgamation of character traits and foibles that dispose a person to spend long hours at a desk, taking interest in arcane details and delight in writing. I am fortunate to have acquired my father’s attention to detail and (some of) his incredible work ethic, as well as my mother’s honesty and joyful creativity. Together, they instilled in me attributes of character for which I am grateful; most important, they taught me what to be proud of and when to be ashamed. No child could ask for a better rearing, an education in character they continue to instill by their examples so long beyond childhood. Their support has been unwavering these last years (as it has been my whole life). Without it, I would not be here, nor who I am.

Last, I have benefitted from extraordinary friendships—friendships of a high kind built around the perennial questions and our honest attempts to answer them. Among so many others to whom I am grateful, Murray Bessette and Steve Lange have contributed more to this project than they realize, though they will surely recognize ideas formed in our conversations scattered throughout. I am grateful for Sarah Wilson’s encouragement: she always knew whether to push me to write, to commandeer a few minutes for a much needed break, or to insist the time has come to “just press send already.”

Most of all, I am grateful to my closest friend, Thomas Null, for his enduring and honest friendship. He read vast portions of this manuscript, preventing innumerable typos and commenting thoroughly and perceptively. More important, he patiently discussed—or listened to me discuss—virtually every important or contentious point contained herein. I am grateful to him for his remarkable patience, as well as for the generous insights he shared and his continual encouragement. On the days and weeks it was difficult to turn attention to writing, it was Thomas who, from a place of understanding and empathy, lent an honest ear and provided the motivation that spurred me to press on. (I hope I will be able to reciprocate in kind.) He knows me as well as the argument of this dissertation, which makes him a kind of friend that is truly rare.

INTRODUCTION

“The Middle East is boiling” in the measured words of Robert H. Pelletreau, a former U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain, Tunisia, and Egypt.¹ Popular unrest first burst to the surface in a region with long experience of effectively suppressing dissent some three years ago in Iran. The demonstrations, catalyzed by allegations of a stolen election, led to massive demonstrations and a brutal crackdown. While the unrest captivated Western audiences, policymakers offered little better than half-hearted support for the revolutionaries marching in the name of democracy, what was at the time portrayed as America’s overdue return to foreign policy realism after the disastrous neoconservative experiment in democracy promotion. In 2011, the tune began—haphazardly—to change. Popular unrest unseated long-established rulers in Tunisia and Egypt. In Egypt, the ensuing Constitutional referendum drew 14.1 million Egyptian voters to the polls on 20 March, 2011, a turnout that “broke all records for recent elections.”² Subsequent elections in both countries yielded their representative governments for the first time. American policymakers cheered both developments, if only after the fact. In Libya, America has been more active. Whatever the ultimate end-game of the intervention, the country’s dictator, Muammar Gaddafi, is unlikely to survive a NATO-led, U.N.-authorized, military intervention sure to demolish his ability to project force in that

¹ Robert Pelletreau, “Transformations in the Middle East,” *Foreign Affairs* Snapshot. 21 February, 2011. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67546/robert-h-pelletreau/transformation-in-the-middle-east>

² Neil MacFarquhar, “Egyptian Voters Approve Constitutional Changes,” *New York Times*, 20 March, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/21/world/middleeast/21egypt.html?pagewanted=all>

country.³ The unrest has spilled over into neighboring countries as well. Large protests in Bahrain, Yemen, Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, and Iraq⁴ have, to this point, been met with government action (coercive and conciliatory) successfully calibrated to preempt the intensification of domestic calls for regime change in almost every case.⁵ As of this writing, however, a slow-motion military coup continues to unfold in Yemen while the demonstrations and the violence continues to escalate in Syria.

Elsewhere, compromise stalemates have broken down. In January of 2011, the withdrawal of Hezbollah ministers and their allies toppled the national unity government in Lebanon;⁶ the moment was clearly calculated to send a message, coming as it did at the very moment the prime minister was in Washington, D.C. to meet President Obama. That message: ties to American policymakers are a liability.⁷ In Israel, renewed American investment in the peace process—the ostensible centerpiece of the Obama administration’s first Mideast foreign policy—came effectively to nothing. Worse, violence between Israelis and Palestinians escalated in the Spring, especially in the South along the border with Gaza;⁸ on 23 March, 2011, a bomb went off at a Jerusalem bus

³ At the time of writing, NATO allies could not agree on the endgame in Libya, nor who should lead the intervention.

⁴ Raad Alkadiri, “Rage Comes to Bagdad,” *Foreign Affairs* Snapshot, 3 March 2011.

⁵ International Crisis Group, “Popular Protest In North Africa and the Middle East (I): Egypt Victorious?,” 30. Even in Syria, the government publicly announced that it will study the feasibility of lifting the emergency law and take steps to open Syrian politics to free party participation. Al-Jazeera, 24 March, 2011.

⁶ Nada Bakri, “Resignations Deepen Crisis for Lebanon,” *New York Times*, 12 January, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/13/world/middleeast/13lebanon.html/?pagewanted=all>

⁷ cf. Barry Rubin, “The Region: Revolutions, walk-outs and fatwas,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 January, 2011.

⁸ STRATFOR, “Israeli-Palestinian Tensions Escalating: A Special Report,” 23 March, 2011.

station killing one and injuring more than 20, the first major terrorist attack to occur in that city in seven years. It what is likely an attempt to shift attention from domestic atrocities, Syria has more than once encouraged protests along its border with Israel. While the protests have turned violent, they have not yet provoked a wider confrontation. In the midst of the turmoil, America's Mideast foreign policy has appeared to be schizophrenic at best.

As popular protests intensified in Egypt in early 2011, "U.S. pronouncements appeared to zigzag daily."⁹ Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Vice President Joe Biden publicly signaled that America stood with President Mubarak, then pressured the regime to undertake state-led democratic reforms; that stance persisted until it became clear Mubarak had lost the support of the Egyptian military, at which point the administration began to celebrate the revolution.¹⁰ In a major defeat for the young political activists who led the revolution, however, a package of Constitutional amendments designed to ensure a speedy national election—enthusiastically supported by the Muslim Brotherhood and the remnants of Mubarak's National Democratic Party—were ratified by an overwhelming majority of Egyptian voters in a referendum that drew record numbers to the polls on March 20, 2011.¹¹ Elections will be held in September, a timeline that is almost sure to benefit the Muslim Brotherhood; liberal groups need more time to organize.

⁹ International Crisis Group, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (1): Egypt Victorious?" 26.

¹⁰ International Crisis Group, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (1): Egypt Victorious?" 26.

¹¹ Al-Jazeera, "Egypt approves constitutional changes," 20 March, 2011.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/03/2011320164119973176.html>

In the wake of the referendum defeat, reformers complained that the administration, currently overseen by a military committee, had prevented them from “present[ing] their point of view” on “the influential state-run television.”¹² It has since come to light that as many as 7,000 civilians have been sentenced to prison terms by Egypt’s clandestine military courts.¹³ Coupled with the fact that the amendment committee was “led by an intellectual with ties to the [Muslim] Brotherhood,” the regime’s apparent censorship of reformist voices lends credence to fears the new regime in Egypt will very much resemble the old, only with greater political space afforded the Brotherhood.¹⁴ The Herculean efforts of Egyptian protestors led, it seems, not so much to revolution as to revolution turned military coup. Military leaders, while making “very polite general sounds” seem intent to ensure not all that much changes in Egypt.¹⁵ On 23 March, 2011, for instance, the military council endorsed a plan to outlaw public demonstrations and sit-ins.¹⁶ Worse, Islamists, including radical Salafi groups in the process of organizing multiple new political parties, may well turn out to be the chief beneficiaries of the protests’ successful

¹² Neil MacFarquhar, “Egyptian Voters Approve Constitutional Changes,” *New York Times*, 20 March, 2011.

¹³ Mohannad Sabry, “New Egypt? 7000 civilians jailed since Mubarak fell,” *McClatchy*. 13 June, 2011. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/13/115722/egypt-military-7000-civilians.html>

¹⁴ Nathan J. Brown, “Egypt’s Constitutional Ghosts,” *Foreign Affairs* Snapshot, 15 February, 2011. C.f. International Crisis Group, “Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (1): Egypt Victorious?” 25.

¹⁵ Nathan J. Brown, “Egypt’s Constitutional Ghosts,” *Foreign Affairs* Snapshot. 15 February, 2011. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67453/nathan-j-brown/egypts-constitutional-ghosts>. As George Friedman explains, while Hosni Mubarak is gone, his regime is not. The regime consists of “complex institutions centered on the military but also including the civilian bureaucracy controlled by the military.” It is not inconceivable that new compromises with and increased privileges for Islamists, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, will allow the regime to persist, albeit under new yet-to-be-determined leadership. George Friedman, “Egypt: The Distance Between Enthusiasm and Reality,” STRATFOR, 13 February, 2011.

¹⁶ Michael Slackman, “Islamist Group is Rising Force in a New Egypt,” *New York Times*, 24 March, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/25/world/middleeast/25egypt.html?pagewanted=all>

ousting of President Mubarak.¹⁷ The Muslim Brotherhood recently held a conference with Salafi groups that reportedly drew 50,000 people.¹⁸

As International Crisis Group presciently warned as events were unfolding,

Some Egyptian observers, anxious about the role the Brotherhood might play in the post-Mubarak period, claim to discern an emerging, implicit understanding between the military and the Brotherhood pursuant to which the former would allow the latter more space in return for it neither challenging the military's privileges nor pushing radically democratic demands.¹⁹

Elijah Zarwan, a senior *Crisis Group* analyst, later added this observation: “There is evidence the Brotherhood struck some kind of a deal with the military early on.”²⁰ The hope drawn from the reluctance of the Brotherhood to participate in large numbers while Egyptians took to the streets now appears to be the product of a strategic deal: the Brotherhood declined to support the revolution; and in exchange, they gain increased influence in the military-dominated order that subsequently emerges. A part of that deal seems to be that the rule of law will only apply when it suits the Brotherhood or other Islamist interests. Violence has escalated in Egypt, especially targeting Egypt's Coptic Christian minority, but little effort has been made to police or investigate Islam-inspired violence.²¹ Similarly, the military has all but ignored the limitations on executive power the reimplementation of the 1971 Constitution was supposed to reassert, a fact that only troubles the liberals who have also been the target of government harassment and

¹⁷ Michael Slackman, “Islamist Group is Rising Force in a New Egypt.”

¹⁸ Yasmine El Rashid, “The Victorious Islamists,” *The New York Times Review of Books*. 14 July 2011. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/jul/14/egypt-victorious-islamists/?pagination=false>

¹⁹ International Crisis Group, “Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (1): Egypt Victorious?” 25.

²⁰ *NYT*, Michael Slackman, “Islamist Group is Rising Force in a New Egypt,” 24 March, 2011.

²¹ Yasmine El Rashid, “The Victorious Islamists,” *The New York Times Review of Books*.

detention.²² The near-abandonment of efforts to police Egypt's border with Gaza post-Mubarak, similarly, can only be attributable to the influence of the Egyptian Brotherhood on behalf of Hamas.²³

There is also evidence that the wider crowd is not entirely with the young protestors who led the revolution. A 2011 poll of Egyptians by the Pew Research Center found that while most (59%) of Egyptians believed democracy to be the best form of government, larger majorities believed Islam should play a significant political role.²⁴ 95% of Egyptians who believed Islam is playing a large role in politics approved of its role, while 80% of those who believed Islam was playing a small role in Egyptian politics thought that was a bad thing.²⁵ In all, 85% of Egyptians said Islam's influence in politics is a positive thing,²⁶ with 49% of Egyptian Muslims expressing a positive view of Hamas, and 20%, a positive view of Al-Qaeda.²⁷ Most tellingly, perhaps, when those Egyptians who perceive a struggle in Egypt between groups that want to modernize their country and Islamic fundamentalists were asked which faction they identify with, 59% said they identified with the fundamentalists while only 27% answered that they identified with the

²² Yasmine El Rashid, "The Victorious Islamists," *The New York Times Review of Books*.

²³ International Crisis Group, "Radical Islam in Gaza," 18.

²⁴ PEW Global Attitudes Project, "Egypt, Democracy, and Islam," 31 January, 2011. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1874/egypt-protests-democracy-islam-influence-politics-islamic-extremism>

²⁵ PEW Global Attitudes Project, "Muslims Publics Divided on Hamas and Hezbollah," 2 December, 2010. <http://pewglobal.org/2010/12/02/muslims-around-the-world-divided-on-hamas-and-hezbollah/>

²⁶ PEW Global Attitudes Project, "Egypt, Democracy, and Islam," 31 January, 2011.

²⁷ PEW Global Attitudes Project, "Muslims Publics Divided on Hamas and Hezbollah," 2 December, 2010.

modernizers.²⁸ No wonder a recent poll found President Obama's approval rating to be 12% post-revolution. Osama Bin Laden's stood at 21%.²⁹ Numbers such as these do not portend a favorable election result, neither from the perspective of American interests, nor to friends of liberty.

With respect to Libya, American zig-zagging has been even more pronounced. The Obama administration spent weeks downplaying the likelihood of military intervention³⁰ only to abruptly reverse itself; suddenly, America was leading a cruise-missile and air campaign against forces loyal to Colonel Gadaffi. The strange justification provided by the administration: "U.S. policy" vis a vis Libya, and the military intervention it is spearheading, are *not* in tune. As the President explained the apparent inconsistency, while "U.S. policy [is] that Gaddafi needs to go," the U.N.-mandated intervention in Libya has the more limited aim of protecting the country's civilian population by way of a no-fly zone.³¹ NATO's policy, on the other hand, seems to be regime change. The lesson: military invention is only justifiable where America stands to gain nothing from its deployment of force.

²⁸ PEW Global Attitudes Project, "Egypt, Democracy, and Islam," 31 January, 2011.

²⁹ Colum Lynch, "Obama versus Osama: guess who the Egyptians prefer?" *Foreign Policy*, 21 June, 2011.

http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/21/obama_versus_osama_guess_who_the_egyptians_prefer

³⁰ Washington Post, "Obama's shift toward military action in Libya," 19 March, 2011.

³¹ *Washington Post*, "President Obama's muddles Libya policy," 22 March, 2011.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-obamas-muddled-libya-policy/2011/03/22/ABAmi5EB_story.html. Disagreements regarding the end-game of the strikes authorized by the U.S. have emerged among the NATO countries involved in the intervention. Whether the aim is to protect civilians, support the rebels, or enable a change of regime is unclear.

The narrative that has emerged chronicling the administration's about-face confirms that the lack of a grand strategy is, in a strange way, the primary justification for America's effective leadership of a new war, its third in the Muslim world. Hillary Clinton's sudden support for the operation was decisive to overcoming the President's initial reluctance to authorize the use of force. Recognizing that Colonel Gaddafi's counter-offensive was likely to succeed in pushing back (no doubt ultimately to slaughter) rebel forces absent Western air support, she finally joined Samantha Power (a National Security Council aide close to the President) and Susan Rice (U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations) in advocating U.S. military intervention on narrow humanitarian grounds, a position enthusiastically supported by France and Britain.³² As Ban Ki-Moon, U.N. Secretary General, explained, military action is justifiable, even necessitated, in Libya because the international community has a "responsibility to protect,"³³ an obligation recently defined in these terms: "the Responsibility to Protect is a new international security and human rights norm to address the international community's failure to prevent and stop genocides, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity."³⁴ Not a few commentators have noted that the "civilians" American armaments are protecting are heavily armed militants with an agenda of their own.

³² Helene Cooper and Steven Lee Myers, "Obama Takes Hard Line With Libya After Shift by Clinton," *New York Times*, 18 March, 2011.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/19/world/africa/19policy.html?pagewanted=all>

³³ Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, "Remarks to the Security Council Meeting on Peace and Security in Africa," 25 February, 2011.

³⁴ As explained by the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect on its website. Accessed 23 June 2012 at <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/>

The U.S. position seems to be that strikes calculated to achieve regime change in Libya (what would contribute to “U.S. policy” according to the President), or coordinated to help rebel forces defeat Gaddafi, would exceed the U.N. mandate. A resolution proposed by an international organization, then, and *not U.S. interests*, are the reason for America’s deployment of force.³⁵ That the intervention lacked a national interest justification or clear exit strategy—and might well benefit rebel forces with ties to Al-Qaeda³⁶—is said to be the reason Defense Secretary Robert Gates and National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon (among others including Vice President Biden) steadfastly opposed involvement in Libya.³⁷ Colonel Gaddafi, no ally of the United States, had at least governed Islamist strongholds in the East “with an iron fist”³⁸ since his renunciation of terrorism in 2003,³⁹ which is, no doubt, one reason Al-Qaeda too has called enthusiastically for his overthrow.⁴⁰

³⁵ Some, notably Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and the Arab League, already contend that the U.N. mandate has been exceeded, noting that U.N. resolution 1973 explicitly authorized the enforcement of a “no-fly zone,” but not airstrikes. Others, including NATO contributors to the mission, seem to believe the aim of the engagement should be nothing less than the end of Colonel Gaddafi’s brutal reign, otherwise known as “regime change.” Disagreements of this sort have proved an important stumbling block in the way of transferring command of operations to NATO, to say nothing of identifying the end-game in Libya.

³⁶ The rebel leader, Abdel-Hakim al-Hasidi, confirmed to an Italian newspaper that some of his fighters previously fought American soldiers in Iraq, adding that “members of Al-Qaeda are also good Muslims fighting against the invader.” *The Telegraph*, “Libyan rebel commander admits his fighters have al-Qaeda links,” 25 March, 2011.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8407047/Libyan-rebel-commander-admits-his-fighters-have-al-Qaeda-links.html>

³⁷ Helene Cooper and Steven Lee Myers, “Obama Takes Hard Line With Libya After Shift by Clinton,” *New York Times*, 18 March, 2011.

³⁸ STRATFOR, “Jihadist Opportunities in Libya,” 24 February, 2011.

³⁹ STRATFOR, “Libya’s Terrorism Option,” 23 March 2011.

⁴⁰ “Al-Qaeda commander backs Libyan rebels in message,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 March, 2011.
<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=212003>

One inevitable consequence of NATO action against Gaddafi's forces: the already weak and fractured Libyan security apparatus will invariably be weaker (whomever ends up in control of it), an outcome that, combined with the month-long looting of weapons caches "reminiscent of... Iraq," will provide the munitions and "operation space" which allow *ihadists* to thrive.⁴¹ By demolishing Libya's security apparatus and precluding the deployment of ground troops, humanitarian intervention has increased the likelihood violent Islamists will end up with another failed state to call home, a civil war perhaps raging around them. A recent report of a respect French think tank posits a darker possibility yet. There is evidence that the rebels NATO finds itself supporting have a distinctly illiberal agenda. Le Centre International de Rescherches et d'Etudes sur le Terrorism, has concluded, from assets on the ground, that the rebels are a disparate group with divergent interests, among whom "les véritables démocrates n'y sont qu'une minorité [the real democrats are a minority]." They are currently fighting with remnants of the Gaddafi regime, monarchists, and Islamists; in cases such as these, anticipating the outcome of the conflict once the threat holding the insurgent side together is vanquished is next to impossible.⁴² According to the French think thank, liberal democracy is the least likely of the possible outcomes. Among the report's conclusions:

Western intervention is in the process of creating more problems than it has solved. Above all, the action carries a significant risk of destabilizing

⁴¹ STRATFOR, "Jihadist Opportunities in Libya," 24 February, 2011.

⁴² Centre International de Recherches et d'Etudes ser le Terrorisme, "Libyé: Un Avenir Incertain," May 2011, 7. <http://www.burundirealite.org/PDFs/64.pdf>

all of North Africa and the Near East, and of contributing to the emergence of another theater for radical Islam...⁴³

To make matters worse, “literally tons of weapons have recently entered into free circulation where there is little or no government control over them,” an inventory that includes rifles, hand grenades, rocket-propelled grenades, military-grade explosives (used to build powerful Improvised Explosive Devices or IEDs), as well as crew-served weapons systems (heavy machine guns, automatic grenade launchers, recoilless rifles, mortars, etc.) and most ominously, surface-to-air missiles.⁴⁴ There is no need to discuss Colonel Gaddafi’s known WMD stockpiles, not all of them yet disposed of.⁴⁵

In other places, interest calculations have trumped humanitarian concerns amidst the chaos. To say nothing of Iran or Darfur, protests have recently turned bloody in Yemen⁴⁶ and Bahrain—where almost daily clashes with increasingly repressive security forces have killed dozens—and yet those regimes have escaped without so much as rhetorical disapproval.⁴⁷ As one prominent commentator has noted, “Obama has not

⁴³ My translation. Centre International de Recherches et d’Etudes sur le Terrorisme, “Libyé: Un Avenir Incertain,” May 2011, 7.

⁴⁴ STRATFOR, “Will Libya Again Become the Arsenal of Terrorism,” 10 March, 2011. Reports from Africa indicate that Al-Qaeda has already moved weapons from Libya, including surface-to-air missiles, to safe-havens for later use. “Libyan rebel commander admits his fighters have al-Qaeda links,” *The Telegraph*, 25 March, 2011.

⁴⁵ STRATFOR, “Will Libya Again Become the Arsenal of Terrorism,” 10 March, 2011.

⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, “Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (II): Yemen between reform and revolution,” 10 March, 2011, 6. C.f. STRATFOR, “Yemen in Crisis: A Special Report,” 21 March 2011.

⁴⁷ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Database. Accessed 21 March, 2011. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch/crisiswatch-database.aspx?CountryIDs={9D2149C0-C350-40FC-BE12-7693FB454AEE}#results>

even uttered a word in support of armed intervention” and has instead employed mainly diplomatic channels to pressure those regimes to undertake domestic reforms willingly.⁴⁸

The apparent double standard is not hard to understand. Bahrain has hosted the headquarters of the U.S. Navy’s Fifth Fleet, in effect the headquarters for all U.S. naval activity in the Gulf, since 1948.⁴⁹ In addition to being of significant logistical importance in other respects, as well as an important staging ground for Operations Desert Storm and Enduring Freedom, the country’s sectarian dynamic—a Sunni minority ruling a majority Shiite country—closely resembles Iraq’s pre-2003 (which is to say, it is potentially explosive). Recognizing the catastrophic consequences of revolution in Bahrain for the oil-rich Arabian peninsula, Saudi Arabia has deployed forces to the island nation to help quell Shiite unrest (which Iran is reportedly supporting actively).⁵⁰ In addition to toppling an important U.S. ally, any change to the Bahraini regime could have serious consequences for Saudi Arabia’s domestic stability, another country with a repressed Shiite population.

Yemen, on the other hand, is home to a growing and assertive Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Cables published by Wikileaks confirmed that “President Saleh pledged unfettered access to Yemen’s national territory for U.S. counterterrorism operations,”

⁴⁸ Josh Rogin, “How Obama turned on a dime toward war,” *Foreign Policy*, March 18, 2011. http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/18/how_obama_turned_on_a_dime_toward_war

⁴⁹ Robert Pelletreau, “Transformation in the Middle East,” *Foreign Affairs Snapshot*, 24 February, 2011.

⁵⁰ STRATFOR, “Yemen in Crisis: A Special Report,” 21 March, 2011.

making possible U.S. air strikes against Al-Qaeda targets operating in that country.⁵¹

Moreover, Yemen's protestors are seeking to unify two established anti-regime movements, the Huthi rebels in the north and southern separatists, a dynamic that could easily spiral out of control if the regime were to fail; Yemen is a tribal society, only loosely united by national affinities, with a long history of civil unrest.⁵²

The military and wider security apparatus are the closest thing the country has to a national institution. But while parts of the security apparatus are professionalized, it is "on the whole... highly fragmented and personalized."⁵³ The defection of key military officials and diplomats on 21 March, 2011, demonstrated that powerful elements oppose the sitting president. The apparent attempt at a military coup was reportedly led by Brig. Gen. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, a man widely considered to be "a veteran of the Islamist old guard" and credited with "the infusion of jihadists and jihadist sympathizers throughout the Yemeni security apparatus."⁵⁴ The defecting officers claimed to be "with the protestors"⁵⁵ (even going so far as to deploy their soldiers in a protective formation); popular or not in Yemen, such a regime would almost certainly be less popular in Washington and dramatically less supportive of America's counter-terrorism undertakings in the region.

⁵¹ James Traub, "The Sunshine Policy," *Foreign Policy*, 10 December, 2010.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/12/10/the_sunshine_policy?page=full

⁵² International Crisis Group, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (II): Yemen between reform and revolution," 10 March, 2011, 3.

⁵³ International Crisis Group, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (II): Yemen between reform and revolution," 10 March, 2011, 15.

⁵⁴ STRATFOR, "Yemen in Crisis: A Special Report," 21 March, 2011.

⁵⁵ <http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/insidestory/2011/03/2011322923357760.html>

Al-Jazeera commentators have openly mused about the possibility of a return to civil war in the event that President Saleh is ousted, an outcome Saleh himself has ominously raised.⁵⁶ The further erosion of the regime's ability to more or less monopolize the means of violence throughout Yemeni territory could be catastrophic for Saudi Arabia, both by increasing the space for Islamists to organize attacks against its neighbors (as well as American interests), and by the potential of the ensuing intensification of unrest to spread to the kingdom. STRATFOR has noted that Saudi Arabia "has the money, influence, and tribal links to directly shape Yemeni politics according to its interests," including a particularly close relationship with Mohsen, the defecting general, which has led to speculation that Saudi Arabia may be contemplating a contingency plan that would involve "a prominent political space" for Yemen's Islamists.⁵⁷

Next to nothing has been said about Iraq and Syria, where protests are having diametrically opposite effects, nor about Israel-Palestine, where violence is escalating to levels not seen in years. Let it suffice to say that in Syria, President Assad—facing the pressure of demonstrations and U.S. calls for increased political representation for Syrians⁵⁸—took early unprecedented steps to appease protestors, promising to allow wider political participation and announcing the formation of a committee tasked with considering relaxing the country's emergency laws. Those concessions have not appeased Syrians, who continue to take to the street in numbers not long ago unthinkable. The

⁵⁶<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/insidestory/2011/03/2011322923357760.html>

⁵⁷ STRATFOR, "Yemen in Crisis: A Special Report," 21 March, 2011.

⁵⁸ "Gates calls for Syrian forces to move aside," *Financial Times*, 24 March, 2011.
<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/f4197d9c-5622-11e0-8de9-00144fcab49a.html#axzz1z1sphmGf>

crackdowns have been brutal, with more than a thousand killed, but still, the demonstrations continue.⁵⁹ The regime has blamed armed Islamist elements for stoking the violence.

In Iraq, spectacular attacks remain a part of quotidian existence⁶⁰ and signs are almost ubiquitous that Iraqis are souring on their new democracy and the utter political and administrative dysfunction that has accompanied it.⁶¹ In Israel, the peace process lies in shambles and a President who, not six months ago, expressed his hope that a two-state solution would be finalized before his next address to the U.N., is unlikely to have opportunity ever to resurrect it any time soon.⁶²

As the events of the last months well demonstrate, the wider Middle East (the Maghreb, the Arab world, Iran, and Afghanistan/Pakistan) is of significant national security consequence to the United States because (in no particular order), (a), the world

⁵⁹ Farnaz Fassihi and Jay Solomon, "Syrian Regime Rocketed by Protests," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 March, 2011.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704517404576222350109783770.html>

⁶⁰ Raad Alkadiri, "Rage Comes to Baghdad," *Foreign Affairs*, 3 March, 2011.

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67557/raad-alkadiri/rage-comes-to-baghdad>

⁶¹ Emma Sky, "Iraq, From Surge to Sovereignty," *Foreign Affairs*, (March/April, 2011), 126-127.

⁶² The President and George Mitchell, for a time his Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, have repeatedly suggested that a solution to the Israel-Palestine solution is the lynchpin prerequisite to a wider and durable peace in the greater Middle East.

(<http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/148321.htm>,

<http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/148525.htm>). In his celebrated Cairo speech, the President demanded Israel freeze settlement construction in the West bank as a precursor to meaningful peace talks. In his 2009 speech address to the U.N., he promised direct Camp David-style talks between the Israeli and the Palestinian leadership within two months. At the U.N. again almost a year later, September 23, 2010, the talks having finally begun, he emphasized their centrality to the problems of the region.

economy relies on a stable energy supply and the largest proven energy reserves reside in the Middle East; (b), America has an interest—whether strategic, moral, or both—in providing support for the state of Israel, the region’s only liberal democracy; (c), insofar as the violent anti-American extremism demonstrated by the events of 9/11 is headquartered in the Islamic world, the cooperation of rulers in the region is essential to the policing of jihadists who would threaten America or its direct interests *before they reach our shores* (the first requirement of which is that such rulers maintain a near-monopoly on the means of violence in their states); (d), to the extent large uncontrolled weapons stockpiles continue to circulate quite easily in the Middle East, counter-proliferation efforts (including, but not limited to, the WMD concerns raised by Iran) will continue to require some combination of active Arab cooperation in counter-proliferation efforts, direct American intervention in the region, and the intensification of out-of-this-world cyber warfare; (e) the geopolitical significance of the region requires that the U.S. military maintain access to airspace, military bases and waterways in territory controlled by Mideast regimes; and (f), America may have a moral obligation to prevent despotic rulers from terrorizing their populations insofar as the international community has a “responsibility to protect,” a responsibility that may extend to a U.S. commitment to promote liberal democracy. The first five interests, of course, are best served where the emergence of a regional hegemonic power unfriendly to the West is prevented. The challenge today is to craft a foreign policy likely to achieve—to the furthest extent possible given the means at the disposal of U.S. policymakers—U.S. interests in the Middle East, cognizant that actions calibrated to advance one goal may well undermine others.

Devising U.S. foreign policy in light of this variety of not-always-compatible American interests the Middle East is necessarily a thorny affair. President Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy constituted an utter rewriting of American foreign policy that in the first place rejected the notion that America could ally itself with dictators in the region, no matter how brutal. 9/11 had demonstrated that the domestic policies of Mideast tyrants *do* matter to U.S. security. Condoleezza Rice explained what was a sea change in America's Middle East foreign policy in a speech she gave in Cairo in 2005: "for 60 years, the United States pursued stability at the expense of democracy in the Middle East — and we achieved neither."⁶³

The Bush Doctrine, today most closely associated with the invasion of Iraq and the U.S.-led endeavor to topple Saddam Hussein's brutal regime in favor of democracy, in fact had four major components. Taken together, they were expected to address the inadequacies of the general U.S. foreign policy approach to the Middle East that had prevailed pre-9/11 and failed to prevent, and done not a little to generate the rage that led to, the attacks on America's symbols of economic and military might. First, a willingness to strike preventatively to prevent the dissemination of WMD technology, especially to terrorist organizations or those who might support them; second, the goal of inducing foreign governments to police terrorism more aggressively within their own borders by making an example of an uncooperative dictator; third, the promotion of "modern and moderate government," especially in the Muslim world as a way of

⁶³ Condoleezza Rice, "Remarks at American University in Cairo," 20 June, 2005. <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/48328.htm>

attacking terrorism at its so-called root over time; and fourth, the creation of new, more reliable, democratic allies in the Middle East willing to support America's counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation efforts.

Notwithstanding the dramatic improvement in Iraq's security situation since the darkest days of the insurgency, Iraq demonstrates the failure of the Bush Doctrine, or more precisely put, the incompatibility of the security strategy's four objectives. The well-intentioned but ultimately ill-fated effort to achieve the most ambitious aim—democratization—severely undermined progress toward achieving the important strategic objectives that were, in fact, attainable. Regime change in Iraq could well have induced states with WMD ambition to abandon those programs—as Libya willingly did shortly after the invasion of Iraq began—and to police terrorist operating within their borders more aggressively—as Yemen, Jordan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and others have. Of course, the Iraq precedent could only exert a profound behavior-altering effect if rulers in the region believed they might well be next to experience Saddam Hussein's fate.

As it is, however, assertive new interest-driven American intervention abroad is (correctly) perceived as extremely unlikely in the near future, no matter how serious the provocation. Why? The democracy-promotion endgame opened space in Iraq for an insurgency, and ultimately what can only be termed a civil war, the effect of which was to increase dramatically the costs of intervention in Iraq. In terms of lives lost, dollars expended, and (not unimportantly), the psychological toll exerted on a people ill-disposed to losing wars, the invasion and occupation of Iraq has exceeded every cost estimate by orders of magnitude. The experience of a grinding, slow-motion, near-defeat in Iraq diminished

America's willingness to deploy force in the Middle East, or anywhere else, going forward—except, apparently, from the air for very short periods of time. This general reluctance to intervene again is further amplified as the immediacy of 9/11 fades, and further spectacular attacks are prevented. Far from proving America's resolve to behavior-altering effect, lengthy interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan have undermined it—both in the American public, and in the eyes of the world. Libya is the apparent contradiction that proves the point: it is not only the most unpopular war America has ever waged at its onset;⁶⁴ it is also a war being justified as unnecessary to U.S. interests, provoked only because the likelihood of humanitarian disaster had reached near-certainty in a country that, while it remained whole, did not much matter to American interests.

The foreign policy President Obama promised Americans on the campaign trail, and which he went some ways toward implementing through the end of 2010, was hailed as a return to realism after a period of hubristic imperial overstretch.⁶⁵ Insofar as the administration was articulating a much narrower conception of American interests in the Middle East—the promotion of democracy as a way to advance U.S. interests was all but abandoned in fact (though the rhetoric of development took on increased salience)—the claim is not outlandish on its face. But in his announced reluctance to deploy American military might in the service of U.S. interests, or even credibly to threaten the use of force,

⁶⁴ Jeffrey M. Jones, "Americans Approve of Military Action Against Libya, 47% to 37%," *Gallup*, 22 March, 2011. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/146738/Americans-Approve-Military-Action-Against-Libya.aspx>

⁶⁵ Fareed Zakaria, "Obama Abroad," *Newsweek*, 19 July, 2008. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2008/07/18/obama-abroad.html>

President Obama's departure from the ordinary realist insistence on the high importance of power—of demonstrating strength and a willingness to deploy it to deter, contain, and negotiate from a position of strength—could hardly be more jarring.

The departure, moreover, was deliberate. It is not too much to say the Obama administration built its original foreign policy on the not entirely unreasonable suggestion that the Iraq war had “created more terrorists than it has killed,” that President Bush’s “highly assertive American policy around the world may increase the probability that it will be the target of terrorist attacks,” and that “American power... produces American vulnerability.”⁶⁶ In other terms, if “the creation of a region that does not spawn, suffer from, or export violent Islamist extremism” is a major aim of U.S. foreign policy, “a robust U.S. ground troop presence in the region undercuts this interest, serving as a major impetus for radicalization.”⁶⁷ President Obama’s 2010 National Security Strategy celebrates and advertises America’s newfound reluctance to use military force even more explicitly than President Bush warned that non-cooperation with the American-led War on Terror could lead to serious consequences. Consider this remarkable passage.

While the use of force is sometimes necessary, we will exhaust other options before war whenever we can, and carefully weigh the costs and risks of action against the costs and risks of inaction. When force is necessary, we will continue to do so in a way that reflects our values and strengthens our legitimacy, and we will seek broad international support, working with such institutions as NATO and the U.N. Security Council.

⁶⁶ Robert Jervis, 332.

⁶⁷ Bradley Bowman, “After Iraq: Future U.S. Military Posture in the Middle East,” *The Washington Quarterly*. Spring 2008, (21:2). 83.

The United States must reserve the right to act unilaterally if necessary to defend our nation and our interests, yet we will also seek to adhere to standards that govern the use of force.⁶⁸

Where President Bush employed bellicose rhetoric and threatened preemptive war in an effort to persuade rogue leaders it was in their personal interest to police anti-American extremism within their borders aggressively (and in Libya's case to abandon an active WMD program), President Obama all but preemptively renounced recourse to arms in an effort to create a diplomatic environment conducive to negotiation and cooperation. The reason for this: he believes radical Islam will be vanquished in the long run not by helping to transform the region, but by building bridges and understanding between America and the Islamic world. A "broader emphasis on Muslim engagement" replaces rhetoric designed to coerce rulers into policing extremism on their own soil.⁶⁹ Thus, the Obama administration downplays or denies entirely its most decisive actions against Al-Qaeda. Spectacular covert attacks against high value Al-Qaeda targets in Yemen and Somalia, the use of a secret CIA army 3000-men strong to pursue targets across the Afghan border into Pakistan,⁷⁰ collaboration with Algerian forces to hunt down extremists migrating to Iraq,⁷¹ remain unpublicized (or at least are not emphasized)

⁶⁸ The White House, "2010 National Security Strategy of the United States," 22.

http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf

⁶⁹ The White House, "2010 National Security Strategy," 22.

⁷⁰ Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 59.

⁷¹ Shashank Bengali, "Wikileaks: Cables reveal U.S. military role in the Muslim world," *McClatchy*, 9 December, 2010. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/12/09/105053/wikileaks-show-deeper-us-military.html>

precisely to avoid giving credence to the charge America meddles with impunity in the Islamic world.⁷²

The President's repeated apologies for America's crimes in the region and his celebration of Islamic civilization's great accomplishments can only be understood in this context. After the Iraq war which, the President frequently emphasizes, was a "war of choice"—and which, there can be no doubt, fortified resentments and served the interests of propagandists intent to intensify hatreds—it would be up to America to demonstrate a willingness to honestly engage the world on friendlier terms. And so, in his Cairo speech, the President promised a new beginning with the Islamic world while downplaying, to the chagrin of many, the importance of democratic reform.

I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect; and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles -- principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings.⁷³

It is for this reason President Obama cited the Qur'an frequently, credited the Islamic world with making possible the European Enlightenment and discovering algebra, and praised it for inventing technologies including the compass and printing. If President Bush intended to extract cooperation from Arab rulers through fear, President Obama believes more can be gained by making their peoples love, or at least like, a kinder, gentler, America. Demonstrating respect and admiration for Islamic civilization after two

⁷² Brian Ross et al., "Obama Ordered U.S. Military Strike on Yemen Terrorists," *ABC News*, 18 December, 2009. <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/cruise-missiles-strike-yemen/story?id=9375236>

⁷³ Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on a New Beginning," Cairo University, 4 June, 2009. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09>

terrible centuries for the Muslim world was the first step, and key component, of that strategy. The President did not choose this track simply because he prefers soft to hard power. More important, the Obama administration believes America's bellicose rhetoric and aggressive interventions in the Middle East are a—perhaps *the*—key reason for the existence of Islamic radicalism. It is not a matter of defeating anti-American extremism; it is a matter of not provoking it in the first place.

This explains the President's frequent apologies for America's misuse of its power, his arguably gratuitous public condemnations of his predecessor's decision to invade Iraq, his abandonment of the term "War on Terror," and his refusal to link terrorism to radicalized Islam in his speeches. On the contrary, the President conceived of America's interests narrowly at the beginning of his Presidency, believing they could best be attained by diplomacy and through international institutions so long as the United States demonstrates an appropriate degree of humility and restraint. Where the term "Islam" is employed in the National Security Strategy, the administration goes out of its way to deny any connection exists between the world's fastest growing religion and anti-American terrorism.

We will always seek to delegitimize the use of terrorism and to isolate those who carry it out. Yet this is not a global war against a tactic—terrorism or a religion—Islam. We are at war with a specific network, al-Qa'ida, and its terrorist affiliates who support efforts to attack the United States, our allies, and partners.⁷⁴

It is not too much to say that underlying assumption of the entire strategy was that the Middle East would largely take care of itself if only the U.S. drew back, especially if

⁷⁴ The White House, "2010 National Security Strategy of the United States," 20.

progress toward a two-state solution—achieved by pressuring Israel more aggressively than previous administrations had dared—was forthcoming. It bears repeating that the President assumed American action in the region, and the plight of Palestinians, were the primary instigators of anti-American sentiment and its most pernicious fruit. The Obama administration clung to that policy while Iranian protestors took to the streets. By 2011, however, it had determined that it could no longer play the disinterested observer. While it is tempting to conclude the administration determined too much was at stake as important Western allies teetered on the brink of revolution, it was rather the fierce urgency of the humanitarian moment in Libya that led the President to suspend his calculated determination to refrain from the use force in the Muslim world wherever possible. Which is why, presumably, a “senior administration official” recently signaled that a major change to U.S. foreign policy is on the horizon. Libya is “the greatest opportunity to realign our interests and our values,” the President is said to have announced at an important (and “extremely contentious”) meeting on the eve of intervention.⁷⁵ Those words bring immediately to mind President Bush and his administration’s promise in the 2002 National Security Strategy (the first comprehensive articulation of the Bush Doctrine) of a new “U.S. national security strategy... based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects our values and our national interests.”⁷⁶ So too do the emerging new goals of President Obama’s Mideast policy recall his predecessor’s.

⁷⁵ *NPR*, “Obama Explains Why He’s Taking On Libya’s Biggest Bully,” 18 March, 2011, <http://wap.npr.org/news/front/134663608?singlePage=true>

⁷⁶ The White House, 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States,” 1. <http://merln.ndu.edu/whitepapers/USnss2002.pdf>

Briefing a group of experts called to the White House to discuss the situation in Libya, the same senior official explained that the president “was referring to the broader change going on in the Middle East and the need to rebalance U.S. foreign policy toward a greater focus on democracy and human rights.”⁷⁷ The United States will use not only soft power, but hard power too it seems, to promote democracy and humanitarian ends in the Middle East. In a major policy speech at the State Department on 19 May, 2011, President Obama confirmed his administration’s foreign policy pivot.

Not every country will follow our particular form of representative democracy, and there will be times when our short term interests do not align perfectly with our long term vision of the region. But we can – and will – speak out for a set of core principles, principles that have guided our response to the events over the past six months.

The United States opposes the use of violence and repression against the people of the region. We support a set of universal rights. Those rights include free speech; the freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of religion; equality for all men and women under the rule of law; and the right to choose your own leaders – whether you live in Baghdad or Damascus, Sanaa or Tehran...

Our support for these principles is not a secondary interest – today I am making it clear that it is a top priority that must be translated into concrete actions, and supported by all the diplomatic, economic and strategic tools at our disposal.⁷⁸

Libya, thus, represents gargantuan policy shift. The tacit justification for the shift offered by the administration had to do, on the one hand, with the magnitude of the spontaneous revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, and on the other, with Colonel Gaddafi’s threat to slaughter thousands of his own people in Benghazi to decisively put down

⁷⁷ Josh Rogin, “How Obama turned on a dime toward war,” *Foreign Policy*, 18 March, 2011. cf. *NPR*, “Obama Explains Why He’s Taking On Libya’s Biggest Bully.”

⁷⁸ Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa,” State Department, 19 May, 2011. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa>

Libya's rebellion. The administration was worried that if Gadaffi carried out his threat while the U.S. sat on its hands, a message would effectively be transmitted to dictators throughout the region: brutal force works, and it is tolerated by the international community. Furthermore, a genuine concern that the outbreak of a civil war in Libya might lead to a refugee crisis that would affect its neighbors, and thereby perhaps also the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, was also a factor. One gets the sense that President Obama believed the democratizing movements might well succeed if Gadaffi could be kept from playing the spoiler, and for that reason, wanted to ensure American inaction did not stand in the way of what might be a world historical moment. The concern was amplified in light of European impatience for intervention, an impatience born of interest calculations (related to oil interests and refugee fears) but couched in humanitarian concerns.

And so, all of a sudden, America is involved in its third war in a Muslim country, drawn there in defense of democracy. There is no evidence anyone raised what ought to have been the first objection: has Iraq taught us anything about the specific reasons the region has proven so resistant to forms of popular constitutional government that at the same time protect the rights and liberties of their citizens on equal grounds? This dissertation takes up the question.

METHOD NOTE

Larry Diamond, perhaps the most important scholar of comparative democratization, recently repeated his frequent observation that “the continuing absence of even a single democratic regime in the Arab world is a striking anomaly.”⁷⁹ Since 1974, the number of democracies in the world has exploded. And yet, of the sixteen independent Arab states that make up the Middle East and coastal North Africa, not a single one can be considered a functioning constitutional democracy; only one, Lebanon, has ever been.⁸⁰ The question that springs to mind is “why?” Why is the Arab-Islamic world so apparently resistant to the erection of states organized along liberal democratic lines: in which elections are regular, free and fair; and in which the government is stable, limited and tolerant?

Scholars today tend to point to economic and geo-political factors to explain the persistent absence of representative government in the Middle East. Seymour Martin Lipset demonstrated fifty years ago that wealthier countries do a better job of gaining and keeping democracy.⁸¹ Throughout the Arab world, per capita incomes remain fairly low in general, and in those countries with higher per capita incomes (Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, for example) income disparity is very high. Theorists from Aristotle to

⁷⁹ Larry Diamond, “Why are there no Arab Democracies?” *Journal of Democracy*. Volume 21: 1 (January 2010), 93.

⁸⁰ Daniel Brumberg and Larry Diamond, “Introduction” in Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg, eds. *Islam and Liberal Democracy in the Middle East* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), vii.

⁸¹ Seymour Martin Lipset, “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Mar., 1959), 84.

Tocqueville have noted the importance of a large and developed middle class to stable popular politics. Their reasoning generally follows these lines: members of the middle class are doing well enough realistically to aspire to improve their position; at the same time, their economic situation is precarious enough that they can imagine falling into poverty. Thus, the middle class wields political power responsibly for being able to empathize with the rich and the poor alike—neither overburdening the wealthy with confiscatory tax policies, nor allowing the moneyed elite to crush the poor. High levels of poverty, economic stagnation, the prevalence of corruption and graft, and enormous income inequality have led scholars to concur that prevailing economic conditions in the Middle East constitute an important impediment to durable political reform there. Similarly, the “oil curse” plays a role. As Samuel Huntington demonstrated, large oil reserves are not an unmixed blessing. Since the value of oil on the world market is disproportionate to the labor required to extract it, countries with resource wealth are able to develop extensive centralized bureaucracies without taxing their subjects. Where the people are not taxed—in some Arab countries, citizens receive cash payments—it should not surprise that calls for representation are subdued.⁸² And yet, as Diamond notes, this is not the entire story. Kuwait has almost the per capita income of Norway, and only eleven of the sixteen independent Arab states have considerable oil wealth; the economic impediments cannot be the only significant variables.⁸³

⁸² Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 65.

⁸³ Larry Diamond, “Why are there no Arab Democracies?” *Journal of Democracy*. Volume 21: 1 (January 2010), 97-98.

Diamond is partial to political and geopolitical explanations. He notes that Arab rulers have perfected “authoritarian structures and practices” and employ them “with unusual skill.”⁸⁴ Mohamed Talbi adds that Mideast dictators have every personal incentive to hang on to power, no matter what crimes it takes to do so; succession generally comes thanks to “violent death or, in the best cases, death by natural causes.”⁸⁵ It is perhaps little surprise that regimes in the Middle East spend a higher proportion of their GNP on their security apparatuses—almost twice the global average, according to Eva Bellin’s recent study—than states in any other parts of the world.⁸⁶ Moreover, scholars have demonstrated that authoritarian regimes in the Middle East have been able to mix coercion with temporary representative outlets, designed to vent popular frustrations, very effectively.⁸⁷ Patterns of democratizing half-measures, followed by the assertion of authoritarian policies, what scholars have called “managed reform,” also helps to explain (or explained until 2011) the longevity of so many autocratic Mideast regimes.⁸⁸

An “unfavorable geopolitical situation” makes things worse: for decades, the United States (and for a long time, the Soviet Union) has provided the economic aid and military

⁸⁴ Larry Diamond, “Why are there no Arab Democracies?” 99.

⁸⁵ Mohamed Talbi, “A Record of Failure,” in Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg, eds. *Islam and Liberal Democracy in the Middle East* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 3.

⁸⁶ Eva Bellin, “Coercive Institutions and Coercive Leaders,” in Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michele Penner Angrist, eds. *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 31.

⁸⁷ Daniel Brumberg, “Democratization in the Arab World? The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (October 2002), 56.

⁸⁸ Michele Dunne and Marina Ottaway, “Incumbent Regimes and the ‘King’s Dilemma’ in the Arab World: Promise and Threat of Managed Reform,” in Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy, eds. *Getting to Pluralism: Political Actors in the Arab World* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), 13-40.

resources that allow Arab autocracies to persevere.⁸⁹ The Arab-Israeli conflict, meanwhile, “hangs like a toxic miasma over Middle Eastern political life” and constitutes, for autocrats, a “convenient means of diverting public frustration away from the corruption and human rights abuses of Arab regimes.”⁹⁰ Larry Diamond has gone so far as to assert that the “future of democracy in the Middle East will remain bleak absent a permanent, peaceful, and mutually negotiated two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.”⁹¹ Last, the ubiquity of autocratic regimes in the region seems to have a self-reinforcing effect for at least three reasons: the Arab Middle East lacks a successful democratic model to emulate (geographic proximity of a successful democracy that is culturally similar can help instigate and guide reform);⁹² regional political pressure to undertake democratic reform is non-existent; and, related to this, the region’s dominant regional organization, the Arab League, has become “an unapologetic autocrats’ club,” more interested in sustaining the status quo than in paving the way for reforms.⁹³

Diamond is certainly correct that political and geopolitical factors constitute impediments to democratization in the Arab-Islamic world. But, like the vast majority of scholars who study democracy and democratization, he frames the question too narrowly. In particular, he refuses to take seriously the possibility that “cultural” or civilization-level

⁸⁹ Larry Diamond, “Why are there no Arab Democracies?” *Journal of Democracy*. Volume 21: 1 (January 2010), 101.

⁹⁰ Larry Diamond, “Why are there no Arab Democracies?” 101.

⁹¹ Daniel Brumberg and Larry Diamond, “Introduction” in Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg, eds. *Islam and Liberal Democracy in the Middle East* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), xxiii.

⁹² Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 102.

⁹³ Larry Diamond, “Why are there no Arab Democracies?” *Journal of Democracy*. Volume 21: 1 (January 2010), 101.

factors may also play a role, perhaps the most important role. He all but dismisses the possibility that the region's dominant religion, Islam, may constitute an impediment to the establishment of liberal democracy in the Arab world. His evidence: eight non-Arab Muslim-majority countries are recognized democracies by Freedom House.⁹⁴

Furthermore, he notes that non-Arab Muslim-majority countries tend to be freer than the Arab states in the Middle East; in 2010, the 30 Muslim-majority countries outside of the Arab world averaged a score of 4.7 on the 7-point Freedom House scale (7 is least free), while the Arab states averaged a pitiful 5.53.⁹⁵ With this, Diamond believes he has proven Islam has nothing to do with it; as he, somewhat flippantly, puts it, "So much for religion."⁹⁶ As for culture, he dismisses the possibility that prevailing sensibilities in the Arab world—for example, enduring habits taken on as a consequence of centuries of oppressive rule and the resultant dearth of "social capital"—might pose an impediment to democratization outright. Here, he derives his evidence from opinion polls: that "overwhelming shares of Arab publics—well over 80 percent in Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, and even Iraq—... agree that 'despite drawbacks, democracy is the best system of government'" means no aspect of Arab culture constitutes an important impediment to durable democratizing reforms.⁹⁷

Diamond's arguments do not withstand scrutiny in either case. That Muslim-majority countries outside of the Arab world—the best examples are surely Indonesia and

⁹⁴ The Muslim-majority states that are categorized as democracies are Albania, Bangladesh, Comoros, Indonesia, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Turkey.

⁹⁵ Larry Diamond, "Why are there no Arab Democracies?" *Journal of Democracy*. Volume 21: 1 (January 2010), 94.

⁹⁶ Larry Diamond, "Why are there no Arab Democracies?" 95.

⁹⁷ Larry Diamond, "Why are there no Arab Democracies?" 95.

Turkey—have established relatively successful liberal democracies does not prove Islam, or perhaps a twisted and ideological interpretation of its tenets, is not a very important variable in other places. Islam, after all, is not a monolith (as Diamond himself is fond of explaining). It could well be (to offer a premature glimpse of this project's argument) that a radical political ideology claiming the authority of Islam, one that has been disseminated especially well in the Arab world (but much less widely in Indonesia) is, in fact, a very important variable. It is not that ethnic Arabs are somehow incapable of limited constitutional government as a result of their ethnicity (Diamond mischievously implies racism drives those who disagree with him); it might rather be that an ideology *designed to impede* liberalizing reforms spread very effectively through the Arab world in large part because its original and most powerful exponents wrote in Arabic. (Incidentally, the fact that very similar ideologies have been expressed persuasively in Persian and Urdu could well explain why Iran and Pakistan—both non-Arab countries—are nonetheless demonstrating a similar species of resistance to liberal democratic reforms. Where local practices that pre-date Islam have blended with Islamic practice—more common as one moves further from the Arabian peninsula—radical modern forms of political Islam have tended to take hold less assertively. This helps to explain the success of the Indonesian democracy.) Diamond's public opinion argument is flimsier yet. The fact that large majorities throughout the Arab world express a preference for democratic rule (in preference to what, totalitarian dictatorship?) in no way implies majority support for *political liberalism*. This accidental but almost ubiquitous tendency to conflate political liberalism with democratic institutions or an expressed enthusiasm for

self-rule may well be the single most pernicious errant assumption present today in much of the democratization literature. This project contends that it is also responsible for foreign policy blunders of magnificent proportion.

After all, to claim one has a legitimate right to participate in crafting a polity's laws does not *ipso facto* accompany the capacity to deploy legislative authority in a way that is tolerant, limited, law-governed, and informed by a love of the common good. Not long after the French Revolution, reflecting on the attempt of a governing faction to solidify its authority by way of fictitious claims to democratic legitimacy, Tocqueville observed that it is impossible to prevent a mania for popular sovereignty from spreading once the idea is let out of the box: "those who think that they can play with such a dogma [the dogma of the sovereignty of the people] and... prevent it for long from spreading... are truly stupid."⁹⁸ Tocqueville, who rarely expresses himself so indelicately, well understood that popular enthusiasm for democracy and a people's capacity to rule well are different things entirely. As he puts it, more artfully, in *Democracy in America*,

The revolution in the United States was produced by a mature and reflective taste for freedom, and not by a vague and indefinite instinct of independence. It was not supported by passions of disorder; but, on the contrary, it advanced with a love of order and of legality.⁹⁹

The point, of overwhelming importance, is this: it is not surprising that large majorities *everywhere* should be attracted by the notion they should have a say in who rules and to

⁹⁸ Aurelian Craiutu and Jeremy Jennings, trans., *Tocqueville on America After 1840: Letters and Other Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 132.

⁹⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 67.

what end; it is a flattering and inherently appealing idea, especially so to those who believe their interests are underrepresented, or worse yet trampled upon, by the prevailing regime. The desire to rule is not, however, identical with the capacity to rule well. What, then, constitutes a “mature and reflective taste for freedom,” what Tocqueville observed in, and what impressed him above all about, Americans of the Jacksonian era? For Tocqueville, Americans had internalized a species of *mores*, sacred opinions and habits of the heart, that equip and incline a people to rule itself responsibly—not simply to make good laws, but also to make restrained use of generous freedoms. The argument of this dissertation is that a people’s employment of their legislative authority—the power of the majority wielded by way of voting, and then, the authority of the state as wielded by the victorious faction—is unlikely to be limited and law-governed if the people has not first internalized a liberal set of guiding commitments. Similarly, a people is less likely to employ the generous rights and freedoms associated with liberal democracy in restrained and neighborly ways if the people has not internalized a social character that disposes it to self-restraint and tolerance.

Tocqueville replied to a letter he received from Louis de Kergorlay in 1847, almost a decade after the completion of *Democracy in America*, to express his opinion on a related point, the relationship between religious fanaticism and political freedom. His opinion flies in the face of the prevailing assumptions today. “As a general thesis,” Tocqueville wrote, “I believe that political liberty enlivens religious passions more than it extinguishes

them.”¹⁰⁰ He goes on to offer this important admonition: “We must be careful not to confuse political liberty with some of the effects it sometimes produces.”¹⁰¹ Political freedom will not always yield the result it did in America, and only belatedly, in France; in other places, it will empower illiberal tendencies and enflame violent factionalism. For Tocqueville, America was exceptional: the place where democracy sprung up, fully-grown. Democracies, after all, can be illiberal, an adjective that describes half of all newly democratizing countries, as Fareed Zakaria recently demonstrated.¹⁰² And as every student of politics knows, democratic majorities have (not infrequently, unfortunately) demonstrated a tendency to abuse their authority, sometimes tyrannizing over individuals and minorities. Nor is it only a majority’s abuse of its legislative authority that threatens to shatter the public peace in free societies. In the annals of history, groups of private citizens, *acting as private citizens*, have too frequently put their freedoms—of association, of movement, even their presumption of innocence—to horrifying use: terrorizing, maiming, even killing objects of their hatred or impassioned temporary detestation. This project is largely about the commitments, so far from

¹⁰⁰ Craiutu and Jennings, *Tocqueville on America After 1840*, 322.

¹⁰¹ Craiutu and Jennings, *Tocqueville on America After 1840*, 323.

¹⁰² Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 98. Fareed Zakaria famously brought attention to the disjuncture between democracy and “constitutional liberalism” in “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” the seminal article which served as the basis for *The Future of Freedom*. There, he noted that “Constitutional liberalism has led to democracy, but democracy does not seem to bring constitutional liberalism.” Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy” *Foreign Affairs* 76:6 (Nov./Dec., 1997), 28. Like Diamond, Zakaria downplays the importance of cultural and religious factors, emphasizing instead the importance of economic factors and, particularly, the importance of a history of institutional separations and localism. As he puts it in *The Future of Freedom*, “The West’s real advantage is that its history led to the creation of institutions and practices that, although in no sense bound up with Western genes, are hard to replicate from scratch in other societies” Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom*, 55.

automatic, that lead a people to be self-restrained and tolerant as they assert their political rights and prerogatives, as well as the origins and preconditions of those commitments in the West. It also asks the question scholars have been polite enough to ignore: is Islam the problem? M. Steven Fish has shown by way of regression analysis that, even controlling for economic development and the presence of oil, there remains a strong negative correlation between Islam and democracy. As he notes somewhat apologetically,

Due perhaps to cultural sensitivity or to an understandable reluctance to characterize nearly one-third of the world's politics as intractably resistant to popular rule, scholars have tended to treat the relationship between Islam and democracy circumspectly and have steered clear of examining it rigorously. The evidence presented here, however, reveals a link that is too stark and robust to ignore, neglect, or dismiss.¹⁰³

Acknowledging that political liberalism and democracy as a form of government are separate things allows one to make better sense of the data and phenomena scholars of democratization tend to focus upon, and it opens the door to responsible normative analysis of relationship of Islam to democracy. Recall that, thanks to U.S. pressure, Iraq and Gaza have recently held elections. Iran holds elections for significant political positions more frequently than any other country in the region save Turkey and Israel.¹⁰⁴ And yet, Iraq, Gaza, and Iran are among the most illiberal places in the Middle East—indeed, on the face of the planet—according to their Freedom House scores. It was not that long ago that Algeria's free and fair elections plunged the country into chaos that

¹⁰³ M. Steven Fish, "Islam and Authoritarianism," *World Politics*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Oct., 2002), 12-13.

¹⁰⁴ Mohsen M. Milani, "Islam in Iran" in John Esposito, ed., *Political Islam* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers), 92.

lasted more than a decade. Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon and Kuwait, in contrast, rank as partially free, but their more favorable freedom scores are not attributable to free and fair elections, nor are they the result of a long history of popular participation. Rather, in Morocco, Kuwait, and Tunisia (pre-Arab Spring), unelected elites with fairly liberal sensibilities ruled moderately, even absent elections for the most important political offices. Turkey demonstrates the same dynamic particularly well: as its non-democratic institutions have been weakened (as a precondition of consideration for admittance to the European Union) the country's policies—domestic and foreign—have grown increasingly illiberal. To lump electoral democracy and political liberalism together, as the dominant measures and most democratization scholars tend to, makes it difficult to investigate the reasons elections sometimes yield stable, limited governments friendly to Western interests, and other times, unstable and intrusive ones publicly committed to the annihilation of the West.

To be fair, although he tends to downplay their importance in sweeping terms much of the time, Diamond is sensitive to the possibility religion and “culture” may, in the end, prove unusually consequential for democratizing efforts in the Arab world. He worries that the consequences of increased political participation in the Middle East may not, in the end, meet the expectations of Westerners who associate democracy with stable, limited and tolerant government. He is aware that Algeria, Iran, Iraq, and Gaza are not models to be emulated, and he is cognizant that empowering the people in other Arab

countries *might* yield similar results.¹⁰⁵ It is not a study of the region's dominant ideas, or the political history of the region, that seem to raise questions in Diamond's mind.

Numbers do. Polls have shown that a proportion of those who support democracy in the Islamic world, perhaps an important proportion, in fact support Islamic democracy—a government that, while legitimate on popular sovereignty grounds, may nonetheless actively limit the rights and freedoms of minorities, perhaps going so far as to employ the coercive and regulatory authority of the state to enforce a puritanical moral code. “We do not yet know,” Diamond wrote in 2010,

what proportion of those who opt both for ‘democracy’ *and* for Islamic influence in government favor an understanding of democracy that includes as an essential not only majority rule but also minority rights—including the right of the minority to try to become the majority in the next election.¹⁰⁶

Diamond is optimistic that democratizing reforms would yield tolerably liberal regimes throughout the Arab Middle East, but he admits he cannot be sure by his own methodology. And yet, hardly any question in the discipline of political science is more urgent today, especially against the backdrop of the Arab Spring. Answering it is indispensable to the articulation of a Mideast foreign policy tailored to achieve U.S. interest, no less than to crafting effective development strategies in the Middle East, to the pursuit of humanitarian objectives in the Middle East (which have more to do with liberal governance than political participation), and to the upcoming constitutional conventions that are the fruit of 2011's revolutions. It is, not, however a question that can be answered by the prevailing methodologies. Analyses of Freedom House scores, economic

¹⁰⁵ Larry Diamond, “Why are there no Arab Democracies?” 96.

¹⁰⁶ Larry Diamond, “Why are there no Arab Democracies?” 96.

variables, and the geopolitical forces at work in the Arab Middle East offer limited insights. Certainly, they cannot yield answers to the question: “what did the drafters of Iraq’s constitution get wrong?” or “How is it that Ayatollah Khomeini’s popular revolution yielded a theocracy?” Scholars must ask the harder, entirely theoretical, question: what produced, in the United States, that which Tocqueville called “a mature and reflective taste for freedom?”; and what are the salient factors—that might impede, or indeed support, political liberalism—present today in the Islamic world? Or to put it another, more general, way, what does it take to build in a population a temperament that will lead it to make limited use of its legislative authority, and show restraint in the employment of the rights and freedoms associated with democracy?

The present study takes a theoretical approach to the study of liberal democracy, but attempts to apply theoretical insights derived from the great democratic theorists to concrete contemporary problems facing the Middle East and U.S. foreign policy today. Political theorists have, for most of history, acknowledged (if they did not simply presume) that a people’s guiding opinions matter very much to the manner in which a given political or institutional arrangement will function in practice. Plato’s dialogues are replete with examples. Hardly anything is more important than the education of the guardian class in the *Republic*; the just regime is impossible absent a domineering moral and political education that creates a very specific kind of citizen. Similarly, in Plato’s *Laws*, an elite group, distinguished by their learning, are charged with the maintenance of their morally upright political community, what requires, above all, the close supervision of pedagogic influences, very broadly construed. Speaking more generally, Aristotle

observes in the *Politics* that a regime is as much defined by its guiding principles—guiding ideals internalized by the population—as it is by the organizational or constitutional structure of the government itself; different regimes will require different kinds of citizens to function as they are supposed to. Machiavelli traces the end of the Roman Republic to the expiration of Romans’ virtue; the influx of wealth and foreign ideas destroyed the republic by transforming the way her citizens understood themselves and their relationship to their fatherland; thus, they began to make new, and destructive, uses of long-established political offices that had long guarded Romans’ liberty. Montesquieu called his great work *The Spirit of the Laws* precisely because it is the temperament of the people—affected by so many things, not least, prevailing manners of religious interpretation—that animates laws written on parchment. Rousseau agreed, and to the same effect explains in his *Social Contract* that a population’s *mores*—its sacred opinions and habits of the heart—constitute the most important kind of laws, more important, even, than a place’s formal constitution. This is why John Locke provides a foundational education for free and limited government in his treatises on government. His refutation of the divine right of kings, and the teaching he replaces it with—that human beings have natural rights—was intended as much to constitute an education for liberal democrats as it is a theoretical meditation. Locke meant to provide a firm theoretical basis for the sacred commitments that, once internalized, would lead a people to be vigilant defenders of their rights, prickly citizens constantly on the lookout for accumulations of political authority prejudicial to their freedoms. Tocqueville, of course, is particularly conscious of the importance of *mores* to free government in the United States: he attributes the success

of the American democracy, above all, to Americans' sacred opinions, many of which he believed were derived from, and promulgated by, Reformed Christianity.

A theoretical approach to questions such as these is not, therefore, anomalous in the context of the history of serious political thinking. At a time France was debating the importance of Algeria to French interests, Tocqueville himself inquired into the compatibility of liberal democracy and Islam from that practical concern in much the same way this project does. He contemplated the works of Rousseau and Montesquieu, read the Qur'an, visited Algeria, and proceeded to give public speeches about what he had determined. The old approach to questions of this sort has lately been marginalized, however, probably as a result of the dominance of the positivist conception of the social sciences. Methods and models that are able to quantify the variables under consideration have the clear advantage of yielding relatively unambiguous results. Some questions, however, are much less amenable to investigation by quantitative methodologies. The character and political impact of invisible commitments held in men's minds cannot be measured and investigated adequately by the methods used to analyze economic indicators, nor even public opinion polls. If ideas, airy nothings internalized by the population, determine how a particular political arrangement functions in fact, the appropriate research method will involve a careful investigation of those ideas: their origins, bases, dissemination, the sources of resistance to them, their evolution over time, the ways they influence political and moral life. It may even be that the dominant methods employed by scholars of comparative democratization have obscured the most important variables—at least in the Islamic world—by their inability to measure them.

One of the main hypotheses underlying this project—namely, that a series of intellectual revolutions built the free West—has been taken up from other angles by a number of studies published in the years since this study began. In the aptly titled *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (2010), Jonathan Israel argues that the dominant minds of the Enlightenment are responsible for the commitments that underlie modern democracy:

Radical Enlightenment is a set of basic principles that can be summed up concisely as: democracy, racial and sexual equality; individual liberty of lifestyle; full freedom of thought, expression, and the press; eradication of religious authority from the legislative process and education; and full separation of church and state.¹⁰⁷

He goes on to point out (“surprising as it may seem”) that “the history of this process—the gradual advance of the ideas underpinning democratic Enlightenment in the modern era—remains very little studied or known.”¹⁰⁸ Israel is right on this count. And while his short book makes a tremendous contribution to the subject, it does not exhaust the field. In particular, the present project focuses less on Enlightenment ideas and their exponents (which is Israel’s express focus) in favor of investigating the reasons the radical new ideas put forth by the likes of Spinoza and Locke successfully took hold of the pre-modern minds in Europe to help build modern Western civilization. This project also contends that the Enlightenment represents but one of three distinct ideational revolutions responsible for building the modern world. Last, unlike Israel’s, the present study considers, first and foremost, the political consequences of these revolutions of social

¹⁰⁷ Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), viii.

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of Mind*, ix.

consciousness in the West, especially from the perspective of the prospects of democratization in the Arab Middle East.

Steven Nadler's recent contribution, *A Book Forged in Hell* (2011), makes a similar contribution, but focuses on a particular Enlightenment thinker, Benedict Spinoza. The subtitle of Nadler's book, "Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age," nicely encapsulates its dominant argument. Spinoza's radical ideas—fairly obscure philosophic and theological arguments advanced in the seventeenth century—in large part laid the foundation for modern government, characterized so importantly today by a wall of separation between church and state. Spinoza, arguing from purportedly religious premises, provided for theologians and priests a distinctly modern—and just barely respectable—new way of conceiving of the Bible, religion's proper (more limited) role in the political affairs of the community, the nature of man, his rights and obligations, etc.¹⁰⁹ With his *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza thus founded modern Biblical criticism: he is the first to argue the Bible is a work of literature subject to critical interpretation, in particular, interpretations that severely limit the claims of religious authorities to political authority on earth.¹¹⁰ This revolutionary new idea had profound, and liberalizing, political consequences. Nadler contends that Spinoza intended the book to "contribute to undermining both the practical ability of religious authorities to control our emotional, intellectual, and physical lives and the theoretical justifications they

¹⁰⁹ Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011), 22.

¹¹⁰ Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, 32.

employ for doing so.¹¹¹ Thus, the *Treatise* is not simply “one of the most important and influential books in the history of philosophy”; for Nadler, by transforming Westerners’ conception of themselves and God, “the *Treatise* also has a proud and well-deserved place in the rise of democratic theory, civil liberties, and political liberalism.”¹¹² On Nadler’s account, too, ideas built Western civilization; without their wide dissemination, political life as we know it would be impossible. This project echoes aspects of Nadler’s work, but focuses on how the ideas spread, and the manner in which they exerted liberalizing political effect. In particular, the current project underlines the significance of Spinoza’s contribution in the context of recent (and countervailing) trends in Islamist thought.

In *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (2012), Brad Gregory argues that “the Western world today is an extraordinarily complex, tangled product of rejections, retentions, and transformations of medieval Western Christianity, in which the Reformation era constitutes the critical watershed.”¹¹³ In particular, he underlines the historically unusual coexistence, in a single political community, of “an enormously wide range of incompatible truth claims pertaining to human values, aspirations, norms, morality, and meaning.”¹¹⁴ In a reversal of the common assumption, the West is the anomaly in this respect. As Gregory goes on to note, “[a] hyperpluralism of religious and secular commitments, not any shared or even convergent view about

¹¹¹ Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, 32.

¹¹² Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, 240.

¹¹³ Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 2.

¹¹⁴ Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 11.

what ‘we’ think is true or right or good, marks the early twenty-first century.”¹¹⁵

Gregory’s book investigates an intellectual transformation that occurred over the course of more than five centuries, one he believes made the momentous transition from modern to pre-modern life possible in the first place. The “enormity *of* the transition,” Gregory goes on to argue, “has helped mask the continuing influence of the distant past in the present.”¹¹⁶

Michael Allen Gillespie makes a similar argument in his brilliant, but very difficult, book, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (2008). Like Gregory, he traces the epistemological and metaphysical assumptions characteristic of the modern West to a crisis in Christian theology, not simply to the radical new, often secular, ideas proposed by Enlightenment philosophers. Gillespie contends that the modern world cannot be understood absent an understanding of the theological revolution against the Nominalist conception of God that had emerged by the fourteenth century, which posited a willful, and frighteningly omnipotent Ruler who was “a continual threat to human well-being.”¹¹⁷ More than three centuries of disputation respecting the nature of man and God ensued among Christian theologians. For Gillespie, efforts to restore a conception of man that acknowledged the dignity of the human intellect, and to reaffirm a loving conception of the Christian God, created an indispensable psychic receptivity among Christians to the cluster of sacred opinions—some of them secular in nature—that would later build the modern West.

¹¹⁵ Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 11.

¹¹⁶ Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 7.

¹¹⁷ Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 15, 29.

Lynn Hunt has demonstrated that the West's literature, too, played an important role in dispersing what would become the West's new sacred opinions. Her recent book, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (2007), takes a somewhat different, but complimentary, approach. She argues, in a lively and accessible style suited to reaching a broad audience, that "notions of liberty and rights" are underpinned by "a set of assumptions about individual autonomy."¹¹⁸ While the "assumptions" that sustain the classical liberal temperament were first presented by philosophers in obscure treatises that advanced difficult theoretical arguments, their wider—popular—dissemination was made possible by novels written for mass consumption at a time literacy and the availability of printed materials was beginning to surge, as well as reforms to prevailing conceptions of education. Most important for Hunt: reforms in the intellectual sphere enabled men and women to empathize with their fellows more profoundly, and across a wider spectrum of society, than had ever before been possible.¹¹⁹ Thus, art roused feeling to teach new, modern, truths. Among them: a new disposition, characterized by a kind of willing self-restraint, that leads those who have internalized it to refrain from interfering with others' pursuit of personal autonomy within fairly generous limitations. Hunt argues that it was novels like Rousseau's *Julie* and Richardson's *Clarissa* that "taught their readers nothing less than a new psychology and in the process laid the foundations for a new social and political order."¹²⁰ Everybody loves, after all, no matter his or her social station. The complimentary educational theories put forth by Locke and Rousseau, meanwhile, shifted

¹¹⁸ Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 27.

¹¹⁹ Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*, 38-69.

¹²⁰ Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*, 39.

emphasis from “obedience enforced through punishment to the careful cultivation of reason as the chief instrument of independence.”¹²¹ Without putting it in quite these terms, Hunt shows *how* the emotionalism of the Romantics complimented the Enlightenment’s liberation of the human mind, even though the former movement sought expressly to refute many of the latter’s dominant assumptions.

Hunt, very compellingly, offers a glimpse of the argument that would, perhaps, have been the heart of the book Isaiah Berlin was writing at the time of his death. Berlin’s unfinished book-length study—to be titled something like “The Romantic Revolution”—was the outgrowth of a series of lectures he delivered in March and April of 1965 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.¹²² It was not conceived as a work of literary criticism, art history, or any other subject that could fit comfortably within the realm of the humanities; rather, his book was to blend the social sciences and the arts, exposing the romantic movement’s underappreciated impact on “political and social life, and moral life as well.”¹²³ In another place, Berlin goes so far as to remark that “intellectual history” in general, and “the relation of ideas to action”—that is, the “interplay of ideas with social, economic and technological developments”—in particular, have been under-investigated in the English-speaking world.¹²⁴ In a fragment discovered among his papers pertaining to those lectures, Berlin expressed the true magnitude of the revolution of the

¹²¹ Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*, 60.

¹²² Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, Henry Hardy, ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), xiii.

¹²³ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, xi.

¹²⁴ Isaiah Berlin, “The Essence of European Romanticism,” in *The Power of Ideas*, Henry Hardy, ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 200.

European mind that made romanticism possible, along with its sweeping social and political consequences, this way:

It appears to me that a radical shift of values occurred in the latter half of the eighteenth century—before what is properly called the romantic movement—which has affected thought, feeling and action in the Western world... I hope to show that this revolution is the deepest and most lasting of all the changes in the life of the West, no less far-reaching than the three great revolutions whose impact is not questioned—the industrial revolution in England, the political in France, and the social and economic in Russia—with which, indeed, the movement with which I am concerned is connected at every level.¹²⁵

As Berlin put it in his first lecture, “The importance of romanticism is that it is the largest recent movement to transform the lives and the thought of the Western world. It seems to me to be the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has ever occurred.”¹²⁶ That shift, in Berlin’s opinion, is defined by a collective uneasiness with—and for some, an explicit rejection of—the notion that a single truth (knowable by reason or revelation) should guide human life: romanticism “shifted consciousness... away from the notion that there are universal truths... that all human activities were meant to terminate in...”¹²⁷ As a consequence, action (directed in a variety of different directions according to a variety of standards, emotions, inspirations, feelings, inclinations, etc.) came to be privileged above thought.¹²⁸ To the extent that this transformation of moral outlook is internalized, Berlin implies it helps to make possible a new degree of toleration

¹²⁵ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, xii-xiii.

¹²⁶ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 1.

¹²⁷ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 14.

¹²⁸ There is strong evidence that both Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom agree with Berlin on this point, although neither emphasizes it. C.f. Leo Strauss, “The Three Waves of Modernity” in Hilail Gildin ed., *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), 93-94. And Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 301-.

of diversity in civic life, while at the same time legitimating—even demanding—a very limited government.

This project employs the method Gregory, Israel, Nadler, Gillespie, Hunt and Berlin have utilized, and it concurs with the general thrust of their findings: ideas that originated in Europe, and which could perhaps only have originated in *Christian* Europe—but which have since spread widely—*made* Western civilization in its modern incarnation. This project goes further than any one of these recent studies in three respects. First, it argues that a strange amalgamation of not two, but three, intellectual revolutions—the Enlightenment, the Reformation, and *European Romanticism*—built the modern Western personality. Second, it pays special attention to the interplay between the sacred opinions of Westerners and liberal democracy as the West’s dominant—its only legitimate—political regime, demonstrating the dependence of the latter on the former. Third, it situates the discussion in the context of the likelihood democratizing reform in the Arab-Islamic world, for the most part untouched by the those revolutions of human consciousness, will yield liberal government. In particular, it examines the powerful arguments put forth by theologians and jurists who have popularized illiberal interpretations of Islam that were, to considerable extent, expressly and self-consciously designed to prevent modernity’s new opinions—and the political regime built upon them—from taking hold in the Islamic world. And it tries to identify the foreign policy implications of these important theoretical insights. To date, no English-language study of the arguments put forth by leading Islamists has been attempted according to the

present methodology, guided by the insight that ideas can have determinative political consequences.

Commenting on the unusualness of his own study, Brad Gregory explains that the difficulty of questions such as these has deterred scholars from taking them up. They are difficult to ask, and harder yet to answer, in part because of the specialized and compartmentalized nature of the academy today. The coterization of the disciplines, and within them, so many sub-specialties, obscures the big picture: “research restricted to the boundaries created by such parceling cannot itself answer the question of how the Western world today came to be as it is.”¹²⁹ In addition to the organizational boundaries that separate the relevant kernels of understanding and scholarship from one another in the modern university, methodological disagreements among scholars and subfields tend to further reify the divisions that isolate academics who are studying questions and problems that are intimately related. As a result, asking and answering big questions in a way that allows the outcome to have impact in any of the fields to which it is relevant requires a familiarity with the literatures and dominant approaches of multiple disciplines or specialties. Too often, this impedes both the advancement of learning and the elaboration of policies that reflect the academy’s collected expertise.

Gregory’s observation pertains to the current study, perhaps even doubly so. This project proposes not only to demonstrate that Western ideals and commitments are intimately connected to the possibility of representative government that is also limited and tolerant;

¹²⁹ Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 8.

it also investigates the origin and character of ideational impediments to liberalism present today in the Islamic world. What is more, the current study means to identify a pressing practical application for the insights it collects. It contends that the failure to understand and apply these “big ideas”—so far removed from the ordinary methods and interests of those who study and make foreign policy—is one of the main reasons for America’s misadventure in Iraq, a failure that has come at extraordinarily high cost to the United States in terms of lives lost, dollars expended, and international credibility squandered. Renewed attention to questions such as these, by what is admittedly an old approach, is all the more important as the United States reaffirms its commitment to democracy promotion in the wake of the Arab Spring.

FIRST PART

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY, DEMOCRACY, AND IRAQ

CHAPTER I

THE EMERGENCE OF REGIME CHANGE AS U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

Rarely in the annals of history has it been so difficult to determine *casus belli* as it is in the case of America's 2003 invasion of Iraq.¹³⁰ Steve Yetiv has written that "it will take years and perhaps decades for the declassification of documents that will allow a clearer picture of exactly why the United States invaded Iraq."¹³¹ When asked why the U.S. went to war in Iraq, Richard Haass, at the time the head of the policy-planning staff at the State Department, told a reporter, "I will go to my grave not knowing that."¹³² Nor can Robert Jervis, one of the most astute scholars of U.S. foreign policy writing today, conceive of a "fully satisfying account of why the Bush administration behaved as it did."¹³³ Perhaps because of this unusual degree of lingering ambiguity, commentators have been able to accuse President Bush of authorizing war to avenge his father, to steal Middle Eastern oil or for the sake of the energy industry's profits, to expand the power of the U.S. Presidency, at the behest of a powerful Jewish lobby, or simply to reassert American military primacy. If these are borderline ludicrous suggestions, the fact they

¹³⁰ cf. Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, (New York: Yale, 2007), 1.

¹³¹ Steve A. Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 120.

¹³² Quoted in Nicholas Lemann, "Remember the Alamo," *New Yorker*, October 18, 2004, 157.

¹³³ Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era*, (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 60.

are nonetheless taken seriously in some quarters is revealing. Even today, more than eight years after the invasion commenced, the relationship among the more serious rationales for the Iraq war—Saddam Hussein’s chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programs, the possibility of a terrorist organization acquiring such weapons, the hope that a functioning liberal democracy could be established in and transform the Middle East—remains difficult to untangle.

One reason for this: the policymakers responsible for America’s intervention in Iraq did not themselves entirely agree about the war’s aims. Too often in the lead-up to war, and more damaging yet, as it was being prosecuted, principal actors failed to marshal the resources of the U.S. government behind a single coherent war aim as a result of disagreements about what they were trying to achieve. A second reason for the confusion over the *casus belli* that persists today: a number of the very reasonable foreign policy objectives that did draw the U.S. to invade Iraq are related in complicated ways. For instance, Saddam Hussein’s decade long refusal to abide to international agreements mandating the verifiable dismantling of his WMD programs necessitated a change of regime in Iraq. Regime change, in turn, requires the substitution of one government for another. Liberal democracy was the obvious candidate for the new regime in Iraq for both moral and strategic reasons; promoting it effectively, however, turned out to be the most difficult aspect of the engagement, so difficult in fact that the attempt to leave in Iraq a regime more decent than the one overturned has created a new set of security concerns for the United States today.

Why the emphasis on democracy? In the first place, the establishment of a functioning liberal democratic regime in Iraq was expected to stanch a grave and gathering threat, replacing a unpredictable tyrant and state sponsor of terrorism long intent to become a nuclear power with a stable state, this at a time when America's appetite for risks born of the stagnant politics of the Middle East had been greatly diminished by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Second, it was hoped a prosperous and tolerant constitutional regime in the heart of the Middle East would lead to the diffusion of modern and moderate government throughout the region, perhaps addressing the problem of terrorism at its so-called root. Third, liberal democracy is believed to be the only morally defensible regime on humanitarian grounds; to aim at the establishment of anything less—a state dominated by a tyrant friendly to America's interests, say—is not compatible with the character of the American democracy. Last, the successful overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime was supposed to serve as a deterrent post-9/11; regimes elsewhere would be deterred from seeking WMD technology and/or harboring terrorists if they were confident the U.S. would not tolerate rogue behavior. More important, they would be induced to use their domestic police capabilities to crack down in anti-American extremists operating within their borders.

It does not, however, follow that the goals that guided policymakers to invade Iraq, and subsequently, to attempt to establish a liberal democracy there, were equally important to the decision-making process. It makes sense, then, to begin one's inquiry not by asking

what regime change in Iraq was supposed to accomplish, but why Saddam Hussein was targeted for replacement in the first place.¹³⁴

There is zero evidence the Bush administration came to office with grandiose foreign policy designs. In fact, it is well known that prior to 9/11, the Bush administration envisioned a non-interventionist, neo-isolationist, foreign policy. As Condoleezza Rice famously put it in the lead-up to the 2000 election, a Bush Presidency would have little interest in nation building; “U.S. troops should not be used to escort school children.”¹³⁵ That the Defense Department leadership had internalize a powerful aversion to nation-building is, in fact, one of the reasons for a great many of operational blunders that crippled the reconstruction effort.

If 9/11 is intimately related to the decision to invade Iraq, it did not serve as a pretext to invade for some other unrelated and illegitimate reason. Rather, the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., utterly upended the prevailing foreign policy calculation. 9/11 revealed the threat posed by the possibility of an intersection of radicalism—*jihadist* Islam—and modern technology in terrifying and urgent fashion. At a

¹³⁴ Many accuse the administration of using 9/11, or the fear and anger the events of that day inspired in Americans, to justify a war that was not necessary, nor related to the events of that day. On this line of argument it follows, of course, that the real reasons America intervened in Iraq have nothing, or little, to do with America’s national security interests. While conspiracy theories do abound, no credible evidence to this effect has been produced. One of the reasons for this: nobody—save perhaps Iraq (though certainly not in every respect)—has benefitted from the war in Iraq. If the war was fought for the sake of oil, it would have been more efficient simply to end the sanction regime, and allow Saddam Hussein to sell as much as he pleased on the open market. If Jewish national security hawks were the puppet masters who drove the Bush administration to war, it is impossible to imagine what they believed Israel stood to gain by destabilizing and radicalizing the Middle East. If one alleges the war in Iraq was initiated to remind the world America is its lone hyperpower, it is in retrospect impossible to imagine a worse way to accomplish that end; the occupation of Iraq has, indeed, had precisely the opposite effect.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads*, (New York: Yale, 2006), 46.

moment, Americans were made aware that an enemy dedicated to destroying the country's institutions and killing civilians en masse existed. They had used the fruits of our civilization against us in a manner calculated to exert a horrendous toll, and there was no reason to imagine more spectacular attacks were not in the works.

As a result, terrorist organizations and rogue states seeking or in possession of WMD, whose interests (which is to say, whose rulers' conceptions of their own interests) were not easily deduced by policymakers in the West, had urgently to be reevaluated. What threat did they pose? The will to strike American and her allies was obviously stronger than had previously been acknowledged; and the means, it was feared, increasingly accessible. How precisely this dynamic led to the invasion of Iraq and the consequent effort to establish modern and moderate government in Iraq and beyond is not an uncomplicated story. But to usefully evaluate that effort—its failures and the reasons for them—one must begin by considering the foreign policy approach and assumptions that had allowed the *Al-Qaeda* threat to gather largely unimpeded in the lead up to 9/11.

U.S. Foreign Policy pre-9/11

The Middle East has long represented a vital strategic interest for U.S. foreign policy. It was President Jimmy Carter, in his 1980 State of the Union Address, who declared,

Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital

interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.¹³⁶

President Carter's formulation is particularly illustrative for two reasons: first, insofar as saber rattling was not emphatically not Carter's style, his uncharacteristically bellicose rhetoric on this question should underline the region's high importance to U.S. interests for readers from across the political spectrum; second, and more important, his statement more or less encapsulates America's foreign policy in the decades leading up to 9/11—there was no grand strategy. America intervened here and there not to balance against the strongest power (as a realist foreign policy would demand), nor to achieve regional hegemony, but rather, to ensure continued influence in the region at relatively low cost, and when necessary, to prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon with interests antithetical to America's. Far from relishing Mideast involvement, the U.S. "often tried to achieve these goals without involving itself seriously in the region."¹³⁷ As Steve Yetiv has recently shown, a new term, "reactive engagement," best describes America's approach to the region since 1972. Call it reluctant realism. There was no overarching grand strategy; U.S. actions were calibrated, for the most part, as hesitant responses to events it did not welcome and failed to predict.¹³⁸

Thus, Democratic and Republican administrations have supported regimes more and less compliant to America's multiplicity of interests throughout the region for decades in a variety of ways. From weapons' transfers to Saudi Arabia, to massive foreign aid for

¹³⁶ President James Carter, "1980 State of the Union Address," <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml>

¹³⁷ Steve Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, 11.

¹³⁸ Steve Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, 12-13.

Egypt, to the funding and arming of the *mujahidin* movement in Afghanistan against the Soviets, to support for Saddam Hussein in his decade long war with Iran, the U.S. has backed authoritarian strongmen in the Middle East where it has served (or seemed to serve) U.S. interests.

Dictators in the region have hardly proven reliable as allies, however, a fact clearly revealed by the calamity of 9/11. One cost of the cooperation of Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, et al. had been tolerating their rulers' tolerance of (and sometimes their aggravation of) widespread public anti-Americanism. The importance of over flight privileges, or land for military bases, or intelligence sharing, or a proxy during the Cold War in Afghanistan, or the establishment of a climate hospitable to resource extraction (often by Western companies) was important enough that American policymakers more or less turned a blind eye to the rulers' odious domestic policies. On the one hand, the cooperation of men like Hosni Mubarak and Pervez Musharaff seemed manifestly more important to U.S. interests than their oppression of their own subjects. On the other, their political rivals were not usually any more appealing, neither from a humanitarian perspective, nor the perspective of American interests in the region. Rulers throughout the Middle East were "bastards", it is often said, but their apparent containment of more serious threats and their cooperation with the U.S. (if often halfhearted) at least made them "our bastards." This justified tolerating their illiberality, even their blatant anti-Americanism at home, sometimes even their tacit support of anti-American factions within their governments.

The approach was far from perfect, but insofar as the alternatives to strongman or military rule seemed sure to be much less amenable to U.S. influence and pragmatic compromise, it seemed the sensible approach on the grounds of the U.S. national interest. Iran's 1979 Revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini's Theocracy is the most obvious proof that the alternatives could, in fact, turn out to be worse (and not only for U.S. interests, but for the domestic population as well). Fears that men like Ayman Zawahiri and Osama Bin Laden, *jihadists* willing to sacrifice everything to damage America and its interests, could well amass political influence (if not outright control) of a key Muslim state as a result of political instability (say, in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan) has always limited U.S. pressure to liberalize those states, even at the height of the Bush administration's efforts to support the democratization of the Middle East.¹³⁹ It is not hard to understand why.

September 11th, 2001 Reveals Mistaken Assumptions

The events of September 11th are a watershed moment for thinking about U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East because it revealed that America's ostensible allies in the region had utterly failed to fulfill an implied end of the bargain. True, they had cooperated in a number of highly important areas. For their help, America had more or less ignored domestic politics in the Middle East. Domestic politics in the Middle East had not, however, ignored America. Far from containing radicals operating on their soil, it

¹³⁹ In fact, in the lead up to the 2003 war in Iraq, the most persuasive argument against invasion (given what was known, or generally believed, about Saddam Hussein's WMD program at the time) was, in my opinion, the possibility that increased U.S. military presence on the Arabian peninsula would destabilize Saudi Arabia in a way that was likely to benefit radical Islamists.

became apparent that rulers ostensibly supportive of U.S. interests were tolerating extremists who proved spectacularly that they could not easily be contained. 9/11 revealed that a key assumption underlying the old foreign policy—namely, that America could afford to turn a blind eye to the domestic policies of Arab rulers—left America vulnerable to a new kind of threat.

Nor were the ruling elites in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and Pakistan simply turning a blind eye to radical Islamic and anti-American sentiment (in part to shore up their own legitimacy). The way they governed was also, in large part, responsible for the complete breakdown of the Arab state. The resultant political and economic stagnation, to say nothing of the monumental corruption and cronyism that is commonplace in the Arab world, gives increased traction to Islamist complaints about America, on both the political and *jihadist* ends of the spectrum. Indeed, on virtually every measure, the Middle East lags desperately behind others region in terms of economic development and the spread of free and stable government, a fact that gives not a little traction to those championing renewed commitment to a purified form of Islam as the solution. In many cases, authoritarian rulers actively encouraged Anti-Americanism insofar as it created an external enemy against whom the energies of domestic radicals could be channeled. To the extent fundamentalists focused their attention on the distant empire whose support solidified despotic regimes on Islamic soil, the despots were thrilled.

That this reactive realism as foreign policy approach to the Middle East *tolerated and arguably strengthened* the appeal of Islamic radicalism is not, itself, a sufficient argument to jettison it. But in a world in which those depots cannot be counted in to contain to their

own borders the virulent anti-Americanism they often foment, one in which *ihadists*' ambition to kill Westerners en masse on Western soil is more credible than ever, the foreign policy calculus is necessarily altered. The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, the most destructive attacks ever carried out on American soil, highlighted a risk associated with the pre-9/11 foreign policy approach to the Middle East that had not previously been appreciated. At the same time, the public's appetite for the toleration of unpredictable Mideast tyrants plummeted as policymakers realized the old approach had created a vulnerability. It is not hard to see that U.S. foreign policy *had to change*.

A New Foreign Policy Emerges

The Bush administration reinvented U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East for a very simple reason: the former approach had failed; it had failed to prevent, and arguably helped make possible, the events of 9/11. To prevent future terrorist attacks the administration developed a strategy it hoped would prevent the intersection of radicalism and technology by targeting both elements of the equation—*ihadists*' access to the means of mass destruction, to modern technology, in the immediate term, while attempting to treat their radicalism over the long term.

To this end, the Bush Doctrine had four concrete pillars. First, it announced preventative strikes against regimes that support terrorism and those that might transfer WMD technologies to them (whether through official channels or backchannels) would be

authorized where diplomacy and containment seemed inadequate. This was the primary justification for intervention in Iraq.

In the interim, however, it was hoped intervention in Iraq would have a second beneficial effect: it would deter other states in the region from sponsoring terrorism and signal to every regime that the consequences of failing to contain pockets of radical Islam festering within their borders would be serious. Whether Saddam Hussein had connections to Al-Qaeda in particular was and is immaterial on this point; demonstrating America's willingness and capacity to overthrow regimes that did not comply with its demands was the key point. The end of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq would provide a credible incentive for rulers from Saudi Arabia, to Egypt, to Pakistan, to Algeria to take the problem seriously or risk being unseated in the ignominious manner of Iraq's former ruler. WMD programs would be abandoned as well, it was hoped, if the U.S. and its allies could credibly establish that they would not be tolerated.

Third, a successful political transformation in Iraq would, it was hoped, provide a new strategic pillar for the U.S. in the Middle East, thereby reducing American dependence on its not always reliable allies in the region. A better relationship with Iraq post-Saddam would, by reducing the strategic importance of alliances with countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, have perhaps also permitted the application of greater modernizing pressure on those regimes, even at the cost of unseating their strongmen if they refused to progressively open their societies. Condoleezza Rice, as she was leaving office, explained that building decent, friendly, regimes in the place of the brutal dictatorships the U.S. dismantled remains a vital interest of the United States: "Our long-term partnerships

with Afghanistan and Iraq, to which we must remain deeply committed... provide a solid geostrategic foundation for the generational work ahead of helping to bring about a better, more democratic, and more prosperous Middle East.¹⁴⁰

Today, these aims are more or less forgotten, and the Bush Doctrine is identified with its fourth and long-term aim: the promotion of “modern and moderate government” in the Middle East. This element of the administration’s security strategy led the U.S. to try to establish a constitutional regime in Iraq, in the hope that bringing freedom and democracy to the one part of the world in which it had not begun to take hold would invigorate a transformation, one that would ultimately make the perversion of Islam that has inspired *jihadism* less attractive.

Threat and Opportunity

Various critics have suggested (failing to note the contradiction) that democracy promotion was both the real (but secret because quasi-Imperialistic) rationale for war, and that democracy promotion was never a serious interest-driven component of the Bush Doctrine, but a disingenuous and flimsy attempt at a *post hoc* justification for a war that might otherwise have appeared unjustifiable given the ultimate failure to discover large WMD caches in the country. It is true that the democracy-promotion rhetoric *was* ratcheted up as it became clear that the intelligence underlying the case for preemptive war was mistaken. Of course, this does not mean the concerns about Saddam Hussein’s

¹⁴⁰ Condoleezza Rice, “Rethinking the National Interest”, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August (2008), 8.

WMD program were made up, or that some other motivation (democratization in this case) was, all along, the guiding concern of decision makers.

The truth lies somewhere in between the two criticisms: Saddam Hussein's WMD program and democracy promotion were *coordinate* justifications for invading Iraq, the second emerging as an opportunity from the first. Douglas Feith, whose firsthand account of the discussions at the Department of Defense and National Security Council that led to war is the most comprehensive we have, could not have been more adamant:

[T]o my knowledge—and contrary to what his critics have charged—[President Bush] never argued, in public or private, that the United States should go to war *in order* to spread democracy... [T]he reason to go to war was self-defense. If that necessity drove us to war, the fighting might open the way for a new democracy to arise (as it did with Germany, Italy, and Japan after World War II). If that new democracy developed successfully, the United States, as well as the Iraqi people, would benefit. But it's one thing to try to ensure that your defeated enemy becomes a democracy after the war comes to an end, and quite another to *initiate* a war for that purpose.¹⁴¹

Asked in an interview with *The New Yorker* in 2003, on the eve of invasion, “whether the United States, if it goes to war, would be doing so partly because it wants to change the Middle East as a whole,” Feith replied that while war in Iraq would create an opportunity to transform the region, something potentially very valuable, creating such an opportunity was not a sufficient reason to invade a country:

Would anybody be thinking about using military power in Iraq in order to do a political experiment in Iraq in the hope that it would have positive political spillover effects throughout the region? The answer is no. That's not the kind of thing that leads a country like the United States to commit the kind of military forces that we're committing to this effort.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 234.

¹⁴² *The New Yorker*, “After Iraq,” 17 February, 2003.

If Feith's account establishes on the one hand that the U.S. did not initiate war in Iraq specifically to spread democracy, his account of the articulation of the Bush administration's National Security Strategy simultaneously explains why a traditional realist approach to Iraq would not have achieved the primary objective of securing the national interest as defined in the wake of 9/11. He explains that while the catalyst for war with Saddam Hussein was not a desire to embark upon a democratic experiment in the heart of the Middle East, a *way of life-transforming* approach to the problem of terrorism was nonetheless necessary (and remains necessary today).¹⁴³ The great contribution of

¹⁴³ Here, he disagrees with Paul Pillar, the CIA's National Intelligence Officer for the Middle East during the lead up to war in Iraq. In 2006, shortly after his retirement from government, Pillar argued in a widely-cited piece published by Foreign Affairs that democracy-promotion must have been the primary justification for intervention in Iraq. His argument is based on his own interpretation of the CIA evidence against Saddam Hussein's regime. He does not go so far as to say today and assert that the evidence against Saddam Hussein was manufactured. In contrast, this knowledgeable opponent of the Bush Doctrine is quite willing to admit that "the Bush administration was quite right: its perception of Saddam's weapons capacities was shared by the Clinton administration, congressional Democrats, and most other Western governments and intelligence services" (Paul R. Pillar, "Intelligence, Policy, and the War in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.85, No. 2 (March/April 2006), pp.15-16). He goes on, however, to conclude that "in making [their] defense, the White House also inadvertently pointed out the real problem: intelligence on Iraqi weapons programs did not drive its decision to go to war. A view broadly held in the United States and even more so overseas was that deterrence of Iraq was working, that Saddam was being kept 'in his box,' and that the best way to deal with the weapons problem was through an aggressive inspections program to supplement the sanctions already in place. That the administration arrived at so different a policy solution indicates that its decision to topple Saddam was driven by other factors -- namely, the desire to shake up the sclerotic power structures of the Middle East and hasten the spread of more liberal politics and economics in the region." Pillar, it must be noted, was not a member of a policy-making apparatus of the government. Moreover, Pillar and Defense Department officials including Feith have since traded serious accusations—the former (generally supported by the media) accusing the White House and Pentagon of politicizing intelligence, and the latter accusing the CIA of filtering intelligence in order to advance the CIA policy preference. That Pillar was not privy to the discussions from which the Bush administration's security strategy emerged must lead us to view his suggestion with some skepticism. And while it is probably impossible to adjudicate the dispute authoritatively on the basis of the available evidence, it seems to me that Feith's account is the best and most comprehensive available. This is not to say that a number of disagreements between Feith and other principals should not be considered. A number of them do, indeed, shed interesting light on the decision-making process.

Feith's account is his explanation of the connection between the goal—securing America's way of life in the era of mass-destruction terrorism—and the means the Bush administration adopted. The administration, early on, discerned that durable security from the threat revealed by 9/11 required more than a willingness to decisively confront grave and gathering threats, preemptively when necessary; from the beginning, key members of the Bush administration perceived it would require changing “the way they live.” Preventing an intersection of radicalism and technology—by preventing the dissemination of WMD technology and killing *jihadists* where intelligence permits—was the short term strategy. The long term strategy, which the Bush administration believed they had set in motion in Iraq, was the transformation of the region in such a way that it would no longer produce extremists.

Condoleezza Rice confirms Feith's account. In a carefully crafted essay for *Foreign Affairs* published in the summer of 2008, she states plainly that “The United States did not overthrow Saddam to democratize the Middle East. It did so to remove a long-standing threat to international security.” She goes on, however, to explain that the removing the threat and reconstructing Iraq as a democracy were always intimately related: what, other than a democracy, could the U.S. have built in the place of the Ba'athist regime that would have been less likely to degenerate immediately, or in time, into another autocracy ultimately susceptible to the Middle East's malignancies? As Secretary Rice explains,

the administration was conscious of the goal of democratization in the aftermath of liberation. We discussed the question of whether we should be satisfied with the end of Saddam's rule and the rise of another

strongman to replace him. The answer was no, and it was thus avowedly U.S. policy from the outset to try to support the Iraqis in building a democracy in Iraq. It is important to remember that we did not overthrow Adolf Hitler to bring democracy to Germany either. But the United States believed that only a democratic Germany could ultimately anchor a lasting peace in Europe. The democratization of Iraq and the democratization of the Middle East were thus linked. So, too, was the war on terror linked to Iraq, because the goal after September 11 was to address the deeper malignancies of the Middle East, not just the symptoms of them. It is very hard to imagine how a more just and democratic Middle East could ever have emerged with Saddam still at the center of the region.¹⁴⁴

The impetus to replace Saddam Hussein's regime emerged first and foremost from—and was the precondition of—the successful elimination of what was widely believed at the time to be a serious WMD threat. Democratization was an *opportunity* presented by the perceived need to overthrow Saddam Hussein in Iraq (and the Taliban in Afghanistan). To put the question in the form of a counterfactual, it is indisputable that the U.S. would not have sought regime change by direct military engagement if Saddam Hussein had at any point decided to cooperate fully with UNSCOM weapons inspections (later UNMOVIC) or if he had acceded to the Coalition's ultimatum—to leave Iraq voluntarily to avoid forcible removal—on the eve of the invasion. Real compliance with inspectors could have satisfied the administration that Saddam Hussein's WMD programs were not a threat to the U.S. Compliance with the ultimatum would have represented a first, very real, step toward the species of regime change the U.S. hoped to achieve.

Nonetheless, a great deal of emphasis must be placed on the term “opportunity” as the Bush administration, certainly key members of it, were actively looking for an opportunity to effect a thoroughgoing transformation in the region. This chapter emphasizes that the

¹⁴⁴ Condoleezza Rice, “Rethinking the National Interest.”

democracy-promotion component of the Bush *National Security Strategy* (NSS)—what is intended to be a long-term solution to the threat posed by the intersection of radicalism and technology—was not tacked on haphazardly midway through intervention in Iraq, but was rather an integral element of the security strategy from the very beginning. In fact, a foreign policy “unprecedented in its goals” was first articulated privately in discussions among the principals, (in system-transforming terms, no less) in the days and weeks immediately following 9/11.¹⁴⁵ The President’s speeches and policy statements between the Fall of 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in the Spring of 2003 often noted the importance of promoting liberal democracy. Important speeches delivered on the eve of war, and as it commenced, moreover, made repeated references to the opportunity war in Iraq presented. From the beginning, then, there was one proximate cause for war in Iraq—its WMD program and the gathering threat it represented—but Iraq, at the same time, presented an opportunity to advance the national interest in a multiplicity of ways. In other terms, there was one cause of, but multiple national interest justifications for, the invasion of Iraq.

Saddam Hussein’s WMD program

In policy statements and the 2002 NSS, the Bush Administration did not at any point argue that Iraq’s WMD programs constituted an *imminent* threat to the U.S. The argument, rather, was that Saddam Hussein posed a “grave and gathering threat,” and it

¹⁴⁵ Feith, *War and Decision*, 87.

can clearly be shown that he did. The CIA intelligence assessments were shared by virtually every other consequential intelligence agency in the world; prominent Democrats who analyzed that evidence came to the same conclusions Republicans did. It is utterly inconceivable that one of the most severe sanctions regimes ever enforced by the global community under U.N auspices would have lasted more than a decade absent a broad consensus that Saddam Hussein's regime posed a real threat. Nor could the United Nations of all organizations have mustered a series of Chapter VII resolutions—authorizing “serious consequences”—in the absence of a widely shared conviction that Iraq's Ba'athist regime remained a potential menace to the community of nations.

Stunned though virtually every observer was to learn that Saddam Hussein had unilaterally destroyed (his claim to his CIA interrogator) or otherwise dispensed of a large majority of his WMD stockpiles (not even the inspectors' final report in 2004 ruled out the possibility some had been smuggled into Syria),¹⁴⁶ he nonetheless actively perpetuated the myth that he controlled a large arsenal. To repeat: Saddam Hussein deliberately misled the international community; he tried to trick his generals, Iranians, and the United States into believing his program was more formidable than it really was. He did this for coherent strategic reasons: to keep this generals in line (all of whom believed those most loyal to Saddam Hussein controlled more devastating arsenals than they), to deter the Iranians, and to deter American intervention. It is well established, moreover,

¹⁴⁶ Douglas Jehl, “U.S. Report Finds Iraq Was Minimal Weapons Threat in '03,” *New York Times*, 6 October, 2004. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/06/international/middleeast/06CND-INTE.html?pagewanted=print&position=>

that he remained committed to reconstituting his WMD arsenal at the first opportunity.¹⁴⁷

The Iraq Survey Group, the multinational commission charged with investigating Iraq's WMD program and locating its stockpiles after the successful overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, is widely believed to have determined Saddam Hussein unilaterally abandoned his WMD ambitions altogether. In fact, the commission came to conclusions at considerable odds with the dominant public perception of its work.¹⁴⁸ In his introductory transmission, Charles Duelfer, the commission's director, notes that "Virtually no senior Iraqi believed that Saddam had forsaken WMD forever. Evidence suggests that, as resources became available and the constraints of sanctions decayed, there was a direct expansion of activity that would have the effect of supporting future WMD reconstitution."¹⁴⁹ In the much discussed Duelfer report, the Survey Group in fact concludes:

Saddam wanted to recreate Iraq's WMD capability—which was essentially destroyed in 1991—after sanctions were removed and Iraq's economy stabilized, but probably with a different mix of capabilities to that which previously existed. Saddam aspired to develop a nuclear capability—in an incremental fashion, irrespective of international pressure and the resulting

¹⁴⁷ 60 Minutes, "Saddam's Confessions," 27 January, 2008.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=3756675n&tag=mncol;lst;2>

¹⁴⁸ Headlines like "U.S. 'Almost All Wrong' on Weapons" (*Washington Post*, 7 October, 2004, A01) and "U.S. Report Finds Iraq Was Minimal Weapons Threat in '03" (*New York Times*, 6 October, 2004) announced the Survey Group's final report.

¹⁴⁹ Director of Central Intelligence Special Advisor on Iraq's WMD, Comprehensive Report (aka Duelfer Report), "Transmittal Message," 23 September, 2004.
https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/transmittal.html

economic risks—but he intended to focus on ballistic missile and tactical chemical warfare (CW) capabilities.¹⁵⁰

The report notes, furthermore, that in the interim, “Saddam’s primary goal from 1991 to 2003 was to have UN sanctions lifted, while maintaining the security of the Regime,” even that the U.N.’s readily corruptible Oil-For-Food (OFF) program was partially responsible for keeping those ambitions alive, and for abetting the survival of what turned out to be a rudimentary WMD program:

The Regime quickly came to see that OFF could be corrupted to acquire foreign exchange both to further undermine sanctions and to provide the means to enhance dual-use infrastructure and potential WMD-related development.¹⁵¹

What is more, Iraq’s capacity to produce chemical weapons remained to considerable extent intact in the decade between the first and second gulf war, largely because essential resources were shifted to facilities that had civilian purposes as well as military. The most important element of any weapons program is personnel and technical ability. Whatever happened to the stockpiles Saddam Hussein was known by international inspectors to possess when they were kicked out of the country for the last time in 1998—the Duelfer report is littered with statements like “ISG lacks evidence to document complete destruction”—the fact that the Ba’ath regime retained, at tremendous effort, the technical ability to produce further stockpiles has not been seriously disputed. Regarding chemical weapons, the report comes to this conclusion:

¹⁵⁰ Director of Central Intelligence Special Advisor on Iraq’s WMD, Comprehensive Report (aka Duelfer Report), “Key Findings,” 30 September, 2004, 1. https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/Comp_Report_Key_Findings.pdf

¹⁵¹ “Duelfer Report,” Regime Strategic Intention section, 1.

The way Iraq organized its chemical industry after the mid-1990s allowed it to conserve the knowledge-base needed to restart a CW program, conduct a modest amount of dual-use research, and partially recover from the decline of its production capability caused by the effects of the Gulf war and UN-sponsored destruction and sanctions.

[...]

ISG uncovered information that the Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS) maintained throughout 1991 to 2003 a set of undeclared covert laboratories to research and test various chemicals and poisons, primarily for intelligence operations. The network of laboratories could have provided an ideal, compartmented platform from which to continue CW agent R&D or small-scale production efforts...¹⁵²

Nor were Saddam Hussein's biological weapons capacities as negligible as many assume on the basis of the prevailing narrative. In this regard, the Survey Group's findings are, in fact, even more startling. According to the very report repeatedly cited by those claiming Saddam Hussein's regime did not pose a gathering threat to the United States, Iraq's dictator could have been producing biological weapons as quickly as within "a few weeks to a few months of a decision to do so", even in spite of the sanctions regime.

The Biological Warfare (BW) program was born of the Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS) and this service retained its connections with the program either directly or indirectly throughout its existence.

- The IIS provided the BW program with security and participated in biological research, probably for its own purposes, from the beginning of Iraq's BW effort in the early 1970s until the final days of Saddam Hussein's Regime.

[...]

Iraq would have faced great difficulty in reestablishing an effective BW agent production capability. Nevertheless, after 1996 Iraq still had a significant dual-use capability—some declared—readily useful for BW if the Regime chose to use it to pursue a BW program. Moreover, Iraq still possessed its most important BW asset, the scientific know-how of its BW cadre.

[...]

¹⁵² "Duelfer Report," Chemical Summary section, 1.

Depending on its scale, Iraq could have re-established an elementary BW program within a few weeks to a few months of a decision to do so, but ISG discovered no indications that the Regime was pursuing such a course.¹⁵³

If much of the intelligence gathered from sources operating inside of Iraq and those who fled turned out to be mistaken (largely because the regime actively perpetuated the myth that it had a large WMD arsenal at its disposal), there can be little doubt that Saddam Hussein posed a gathering threat. His ambition was to reconstitute his WMD programs once the sanctions regime no longer impeded that goal. Its deterioration was well underway by 2003. He believed, moreover, that he was still at war with the U.S. (a fact evidenced by his constant attempts to shoot down the American patrols that enforced the no-fly zones over Northern and Southern Iraq). In fact, Charles Duelfer himself, in the transmission that introduces his report, explains that Saddam Hussein's ambitions had not been diminished by a decade of U.S.-led containment:

Saddam's perspective on the world and his place in history was naturally a very long view. He had long timelines—certainly as compared with Western democracies, which are driven by news and election cycles. He also had a strong sense of the glory of a long struggle... Saddam refused to admit Iraq lost the war in 1991... Saddam saw it only as a temporary setback.¹⁵⁴

Duelfer goes on to acknowledge that Saddam Hussein placed a very high value of WMD development:

the Iraqis believed that their possession and willingness to use WMD (CW and BW) contributed substantially to deterring the United States from going on to Baghdad in 1991. WMD demonstrated its worth to Saddam. Moreover, senior Iraqis have observed that, if Saddam had waited until he

¹⁵³ “Duelfer Report,” Biological weapons section summary, 1.

¹⁵⁴ “Duelfer Report,” Transmittal message.

finished his nuclear weapon before invading Kuwait, the outcome would have been much different.¹⁵⁵

Somewhat perversely, it is precisely the high strategic value Saddam Hussein attributed to the possession of WMD that motivated him to pretend he possessed large stockpiles. He led generals and high-ranking government officials to believe his arsenal was formidable, and perpetuated the same myth by his cat-and-mouse game with weapons inspectors, even as America's military amassed a sizable force along his borders, because he remained under the mistaken impression that America would not invade so long as U.S. intelligence indicated that he did possess WMD.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, it was nothing other than his WMD bravado—in his mind, the only sure way to deter the U.S. and avoid invasion—that, in the final analysis, provoked the war that would unseat him. In other words, by his refusal to submit to determinative weapons inspections Saddam Hussein inadvertently sustained the very myth that made it all but impossible for American policymakers to refrain from embarking upon a war to overthrow his regime in the post 9/11 world.

To call Saddam Hussein's miscalculation a strategic blunder is a mild way to describe the brinkmanship that resulted in his overthrow. But it is not the worst strategic mistake he made as Iraq's dictator. In 1990, the Iraqi army invaded Kuwait before testing a nuclear weapon and establishing modern warfare's most powerful deterrent, even though his scientists were, at the time, as little as one year away from achieving the milestone.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ "Duelfer Report," Transmittal message.

¹⁵⁶ 60 Minutes, "Saddam's Confessions," 27 January, 2008.

¹⁵⁷ William J. Broad, "U.S. Web Archive Is Said to Reveal a Nuclear Primer," *New York Times*, 3 November, 2006.

Whether Saddam Hussein was emboldened by the American Ambassador to Iraq (April Glaspie had communicated to Saddam Hussein himself that the U.S. had “no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait”), or simply impatient to extend his influence, there can be no doubt but that the free West has benefitted disproportionately from strategic errors committed by overconfident fascist dictators over the course of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁸ Recall that Saddam Hussein aspired, very openly, to unify the Arab world under his iron fist. That Saudi Arabia and Iran were likely to be the next targets of his expansionist ambitions cannot be doubted. Nor is there any doubt that recent history would have unfolded very differently had not Saddam Hussein’s nuclear ambitions been thwarted preemptively in 1982 and 1991.

In other words, the 2003 war in Iraq can be justified both on conventional strategic grounds even though large stockpiles of weapons were never found. Saddam Hussein remained committed to reestablishing his WMD arsenal and the containment regime preventing it was disintegrating. If his WMD capabilities were significantly overestimated in 2003, Saddam Hussein did represent a gathering threat, one that would have become intolerable if the sanctions regime continued to disintegrate. He was overthrown in 2003 for the simply reason that 9/11 had reduced the American public’s tolerance for threats

http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/03/world/middleeast/03documents.html?_r=1&hp&ex=1162530000&en=1511d6b3da302d4f&ei=5094&partner=homepage

¹⁵⁸ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “An Unnecessary War,” *Foreign Policy*, 1 January, 2003.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2003/01/01/an_unnecessary_war?print=yes&hidecomments=yes&page=full. cf. Thomas Friedman, “Confrontation in the Gulf,” *New York Times*, 23 September, 1990. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/08/12/world/confrontation-in-the-gulf-us-gulf-policy-vague-vital-interest.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

emanating from the Middle East, what simultaneously increased the public's willingness to support a foreign war.

Safeguarding Our Way of Life

If one consensus existed among the principle policy-makers almost immediately following 9/11, it was that neither a law-enforcement approach to terrorism, nor a strictly retaliatory military campaign against those responsible for the attacks (and the state sponsors who aided them), would be sufficient to accomplish the primary goal of the emerging foreign policy strategy: preventing future attacks of similar or greater magnitude.

The task is easier said than done, however. 9/11 introduced the U.S. and the world to a form of terrorism that simply cannot be tolerated and with which it is impossible to compromise or negotiate. Moreover, terrorists willing to sacrifice themselves are, in principal, impossible to deter; demanding nothing less than America's complete abandonment of an area of vital strategic interests, they cannot be appeased; and given the devastation they seek to inflict, they cannot be tolerated. Jihadist terrorism is, quite simply, a form of violence that must be eliminated so far as it is reasonably possible to do so. Saddam Hussein's regime was targeted in the first place, as we have seen, to limit the chances the means of mass destruction would ever fall into the hands of fanatics. War planners hoped it would, simultaneously, provide an opportunity to address the extremism.

For the administration was not simply concerned to secure American lives and property against future attack, though this was certainly of utmost concern. Securing America's *way of life* against an enemy that seeks explicitly to disrupt it—by causing panic, insecurity, terror—was the overarching strategic aim. But it was also recognized that defensive measures alone would not suffice to achieve that aim. There was a real concern that a failure to confront terrorism abroad would require changing the way we live in an effort to prevent attacks at home. As Feith recounts the concerns immediately expressed by Pentagon officials, both civilian and military (and it is a point he reiterates several times):

Foremost in our minds was the prospect that 9/11 might be succeeded by further large-scale attacks on the United States. That could permanently change the nature of American society, driving the government toward undesirable—even if necessary—protective measures. At stake would be America's essential traits: our civil liberties and the open nature of our society... It would be sensible for U.S. officials to understand their mission as defeating terrorism *as a threat to American freedom and openness*. If we fought the terrorists so effectively that they no longer threatened the nature of our society—isolated future attacks notwithstanding—the United States would have achieved a substantial victory.¹⁵⁹

Nor did the administration labor under the illusion that it would be possible to prevent every single terrorist attack. This was not the strategy's aim because it was simply not believed to be within the realm of possibility: "We cannot expect to eliminate every terrorist activity but we can realistically aim to prevent terrorism from undermining our way of life and to demonstrate its futility as a weapon of political blackmail against American and our interests."¹⁶⁰ The aim can be fairly summarized as follows: prevent way of life altering attacks without changing America's way of life.

¹⁵⁹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 10; cf. 69, 166.

¹⁶⁰ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 50-51.

It is worth considering the two alternative strategies that were immediately rejected, and especially the reasons they were rejected, as they both seem to be gaining popularity today. The first, a law enforcement approach to terrorism, was rejected because terrorism is manifestly unlike other crimes. Investigating terrorist attacks after they occur with the aim of bringing the perpetrators to justice does little to counteract the destruction and panic terrorists aim to bring about. Where criminals conspire to murder thousands of Americans and destroy the country's economic, military, and political landmarks, waiting for the crime to occur (or even for rock-solid evidence that it is impending) before thwarting the plotters is simply not an option. Nor do the other guiding purposes of a law enforcement approach obtain in this case. We convict and incarcerate to prevent the same people from committing future crimes, while deterring those who might otherwise be inclined to imitate them by the prospect of certain punishment. Where the criminals in question are willing to sacrifice themselves to commit a single crime of terrifying magnitude, the ordinary law enforcement prevention and deterrence calculus does not apply. Where those who pose a threat fear neither death nor imprisonment, the efficacy of a law enforcement approach is severely limited.

True, the police often act to *prevent* crimes before they occur, or when they have a reason to believe a crime is imminent. But they do so by curtailing and restricting the freedom of movement and action of law-abiding citizens in the hope of identifying (or deterring) would-be criminals—by, for example, establishing check-points or check-stops, or by searching bags in crowded and sensitive areas. No doubt, these are perfectly reasonable infringements: both justified by the harm they seek to prevent, and because they are

proportionate to their aim. The law-enforcement methods that would be required to prevent another terrorist attack would likely be intolerably intrusive were U.S. efforts limited entirely to policing. Security searches, increased surveillance, the expanded use of profiling, and increased limitations on access to sensitive sites are all prudent measures. But they cannot be relied upon exclusively without being expanded to the point that they undermine our way of life. Somewhat perversely, the law-enforcement approach to preventing terror attacks threatens to erode the very aspects of our way of life we are seeking to secure against those bent on undermining it through fear. Or as Feith puts it, “There were simply too many tall buildings—too many major targets—in New York and across the country for us to protect them by trying to secure each individually. Any such attempt could change life in America radically, and for the worse, requiring methods characteristic of a police state.”¹⁶¹

A strictly retaliatory strike, directed against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, would similarly have failed to accomplish the administration’s guiding objective. Preventing the next terrorist attack requires more than simply neutralizing those who perpetrated the last one, especially when the enemy operates as a loosely coordinated network for strategic reasons. Securing the country requires striking at would-be Al-Qaedas—annihilating training camps, seizing resources, monitoring communications—before they are capable of striking America in spectacular fashion. The administration was cognizant that its military response could not be confined to those directly responsible for the attacks on New York and Washington, the architects and abettors of the previous attacks, for the

¹⁶¹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 11.

simply reason that it is a war against those who will undertake the next one if they are permitted the opportunity.

Deterring Deterrables, and Inducing Enthusiasm

Feith and others at the Department of Defense appreciated early on that because of the amorphous nature of terrorist cells—they tend to be loosely bound, their membership always fluctuating, many are not permanently tied to any single geographic location, and new ones are always springing up—the most effective way to combat terrorism in the short term would be to take away those things they cannot successfully organize far-flung attacks without: most importantly, state sponsors (and secondarily, their means of communication and finance). Thus, in contrast to Colin Powell and others at the State Department who countenanced a narrower focus on Afghanistan and Al-Qaeda, Feith, along with the Secretary Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz, argued that the U.S. response ought to be calibrated to deter the actors susceptible to being deterred: if not the terrorist organizations themselves, the states that had sponsored and harbored terrorists in the past, and might consider continuing to do so in the future. Nor was it simply a matter of ending state sponsorship. States that had tolerated Anti-American extremism (most of the 9/11 hijackers were Saudi citizens) could be induced to police the problem more aggressively given the proper incentive to do so.

This aspect of the Bush Doctrine is underappreciated in the extreme. Few commentators have noted it, and many prominent analysts have missed it altogether.¹⁶² What the Bush administration understood is that a small number of well-selected and well-executed military campaigns could have a disproportionate global impact on terrorist networks by persuading state sponsors to change their behavior (or risk becoming the next target). The best way to neutralize and contain terrorist cells in Pakistan, the Philippines, and Saudi Arabia is to persuade foreign governments that it is *in their interest* to root out *jihadists* before they can attack beyond the state's borders. Neither the NYPD nor even military forces commanded by CENTCOM can police a meeting of *jihadists* in Amman. The Jordanians, however, can. This is why President Bush declared before a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." Foreign governments had to know they would be held responsible for future threats to American interests that gathered within their borders as a result of their failure to police them; de facto declarations of neutrality are not sufficient where all that is required for a threat to gather is for the state to turn a blind eye. It is also one of the earliest arguments

¹⁶² Bruce Russett, for example, neglects this aspect of the Bush Doctrine in his widely-read 2005 piece, "Bushwhacking the Democratic Peace." While he acknowledges that a number of rationales played roles among those involved in making the decision to go to war—on his account, WMD concerns, Saddam Hussein's brutal treatment of his own population, overblown fears of connections between Iraq and *Al-Qaeda*, concern for Israel, etc., "helped produced an intergovernmental coalition that could converge on deciding, to go to war despite the different reasons for arriving at that decision"—he does not mention the administration's desire to induce enthusiastic cooperation on the part of reluctant Arab rulers. Bruce Russett, "Bushwhacking the Democratic Peace" *International Studies Perspectives*. (2005) 6, 396. Robert Jervis, similarly, identifies four distinct (if related) components of the Bush Doctrine without identifying the high emphasis the administration placed on inducing cooperation elsewhere in the Islamic world by making an example of Saddam Hussein. He does, however, note that the administration may, nonetheless, have expected regime change in Iraq to change behavior in Iran, Syria, and North Korea. Cf. Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 79, 99.

for overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, one suggested by Rumsfeld even before Bin Laden's connection to 9/11 was firmly established. Feith recounts the calculus with brutal candor:

The problem with focusing on Afghanistan, he [Rumsfeld] said, was that the country lacked valuable terrorist infrastructure targets. Bin Laden's assets were not buildings but people. Destroying the scant infrastructure in Afghanistan would not cause the kind of pain that was likely to change behavior throughout the terrorists' network, especially by state supporters... Iraq, he observed, was a state that supported terrorism, and that might someday offer terrorist weapons of mass destruction to use against us. Unlike Afghanistan, however, Iraq also had substantial infrastructure and military capability. In Iraq, he noted, we could inflict the kind of costly damage that could cause terrorist-supporting regimes around the world to rethink their policies.¹⁶³

This remains, perhaps, the single best interest justification for regime change in Iraq. It worked. From Algeria to Jordan to Pakistan, rulers have policed Anti-American extremism much more aggressively since 2003. Colonel Gadaffi voluntarily relinquished his WMD program—and permitted verification of his compliance—as a direct result of intervention in Iraq. He was also induced to rethink his active sponsorship of terrorist, and as STRATFOR has noted, he governed Islamist strongholds in the country's East “with an iron fist”¹⁶⁴ after his renunciation of terrorism in 2003.¹⁶⁵ The value of the Iraq example as inducement to other regimes was, without a doubt, the pillar of the Bush Doctrine that was emphasized least. While Feith and Rumsfeld would never put it in these terms, the reason this justification could not be trumpeted from official rooftops—neither then nor now—is obvious: making an example of one country to change the behavior of other regimes is not precisely legal according to international law. The

¹⁶³ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 15.

¹⁶⁴ STRATFOR, “Jihadist Opportunities in Libya,” 24 February 2011.

¹⁶⁵ STRATFOR, “Libya's Terrorism Option,” 23 March 2011.

WMD justification, in contrast, was trumpeted to the extent it was because it very arguably justified war, even according to international law and existing U.N. resolutions.¹⁶⁶

The case for unseating Saddam Hussein was, then, multi-faceted. It should go without saying that the strategic rationale for intervention can, in principle, remain valid even if a number of pre-war assumptions prove mistaken. It was hoped that attacking Iraq would send a message to every regime, rogue or respectable: do not support, do not even ignore, terrorists operating in your country; do not develop WMD; in a post-9/11 world, moreover, you will have no choice but to open your societies to the rest of the world. Nor was Saddam Hussein to be made an example of arbitrarily. He had every opportunity to cooperate with the UN weapons inspectors. And he was responsible for a litany of crimes many of which are arguably sufficient to justify the overthrow of his regime on their own: he had invaded two countries (for conquest) and launched missiles against four; he had developed and used chemical weapons on foreigners as well as his own citizens; he had harbored, supported, and encouraged terrorism against targets in Israeli including

¹⁶⁶ Critics of the Bush administration have long charged with breathless indignation that these reports—of Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz discussing military action against Iraq both before it was known who was responsible for 9/11, as well as after it became clear that Saddam Hussein had nothing to do it—somehow prove that the invasion of Iraq was motivated by factors extraneous to the war on terror. “We are occupying a country that did not attack us and that has no ties to 9/11” was for a long time a popular refrain. Those who utter it seem seriously to believe that the whole of a country’s foreign policy can be reduced to speaking softly, and periodically retaliating once an enemy has struck and blame has been assigned, as though the fact that Iraq did not attack the United States somehow proves beyond a doubt that America’s intervention there was utterly bereft of strategic value. That they cannot conceive of an interest-driven strategic rationale for targeting Iraq beyond direct retaliation for 9/11, the existence of an imminent threat to the U.S., or the existence of incontrovertible high-level links between Al-Qaeda and Iraq, reveals a serious failure of strategic imagination on their part. The litany of conspiracy theories, and the enthusiasm to attribute nefarious motives to Bush administration principals, is traceable to precisely this failure of intelligence.

civilians; he had flouted the terms upon which an end to the 1990 war to liberate Kuwait was negotiated; he continually and flagrantly violated more than a dozen U.N. chapter 7 resolutions (each of which authorized “serious consequences”); he was firing on U.S. and British no-fly zone patrols daily; his regime was behind the attempted assassination of an American president; and there was mounting evidence that the nearly fifteen-year-old containment regime was breaking down (the U.N.’s Oil-for-Food had been thoroughly corrupted further diluting the effect of U.N. sanctions).

Changing the Way They Live

In addition to these incontrovertibly interest-driven rationales for war in Iraq, justifications that satisfied many self-described realists at the time, the long-term element of the administration’s security strategy—democracy promotion—emerged early on among Pentagon officials, directly from a consideration of what it would take to prevent future attacks. It would not be enough to rely on law enforcement approaches at home and strikes against terrorist organizations and their sponsors abroad. As President Bush explained on September 20th, less than three weeks after the attacks on New York and Washington, “the only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows”; as Feith explains, “the President decided that,

in dealing with the terrorists, he had the choice of changing the way *we* live or changing the way *they* live.”¹⁶⁷

Feith goes on to explain that the president insisted from the beginning that they “break with the standard, backward-looking retaliatory posture the United States had taken in the past against its terrorist enemies.”¹⁶⁸ The Bush administration wanted a truly constructive strategy—taking steps to identify and neutralize threats in short term was paramount, but the President was looking for an approach that could, over the long term, prevent terrorist strikes against the U.S. by affecting the circumstances under which terrorist organizations recruit and thrive. A Defense Department Strategic Guidance approved on October 3rd, 2001, recognized that it would not be enough to “disrupt, damage, or destroy” terrorist networks, nor even to change the behavior of state sponsors. Although the Department of Defense did not expect to take the lead on this aspect of the strategy initially, it was recognized less than one month after 9/11 that the U.S. government would also have to “encourage populations dominated by terrorist organizations or their supporters to overthrow that domination.”¹⁶⁹ Noting that this idea was not highly developed at the time, Feith goes on to note that “[t]he Guidance recognized the ideological component of the war on terrorism by making it an objective to ‘support the creation of an international political environment hostile to terrorism.’” Feith summarizes his chapter on the elaboration of the strategy that would eventually lead to intervention not only in Afghanistan, but in Iraq as well, in these terms: “In a

¹⁶⁷ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 70-71.

¹⁶⁸ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 87.

¹⁶⁹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 84-85.

little more than three weeks after 9/11, the Defense Department had helped the President set a course for a war that was ambitious in its scope and unprecedented in its goals.”¹⁷⁰

Indications that an aggressive action to bring about social and political reform in the Middle East as a foreign policy strategy to confront Islamic terrorism was being discussed early on, long before the failure to turn up the expected WMD stockpiles, can be found throughout Feith’s book. He makes much of a conversation that took place in early October, 2001, with Qaboos bin Said, the Sultan of Oman, regarding the war’s “ideological essence.”

He spoke of a great contest within the Muslim world—between fanatical Islamists, who inspired the terrorists with visions of a restored caliphate, and their opponents. The extremists were driven by their particular vision of a new universal Islamic state that would be heir to the Prophet Mohammed’s empire, would follow Muslim law, and would be administered by a *caliph*, Allah’s deputy on earth. Qaboos warned us against focusing our attention too narrowly on military objectives, for he thought that the outcome of the war might ultimately be decided in the world of ideas. Rumsfeld and I exchanged a glance to confirm that we had registered the important of the Sultan’s words.¹⁷¹

Feith complains on this, and many other occasions, that the U.S. government was not sufficiently attuned to the ideational aspect of the conflict. He repeatedly laments the inadequacy of the State Department’s effort to confront the radical ideology that fired Islamic extremists. Whereas he and Rumsfeld believed the battle of ideas would be a central front in the broader war on terrorism, he argues that “neither Powell nor Armitage [at State] saw the philosophical dimension of the war as particularly important.

¹⁷⁰ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 87.

¹⁷¹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 94.

This was consistent with their general lack of interest in what they called ‘ideology.’”¹⁷²

Feith’s first attempt to remedy this deficiency was the creation of a new organization within the Department of Defense called the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI), its *raison d’être*: “to develop strategies against jihadist ideology.”¹⁷³ It envisioned, among other things, providing technology to foreign governments that would have made the internet, language and educational software, as well as news broadcasts, available in areas where radical (often Saudi-funded) *madrassas* dominated the social and religious life of a community, thereby exerting a virtual monopolies over children’s education among other things. The areas Feith hoped to impact with this strategy have long been points of interest in the war on terrorism, for instance, along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Important though this type of engagement surely is to the war against terrorism, the entire office had promptly to be dismantled when the *New York Times* provoked uproar among *bien-pensants* with a baseless and uncorroborated story alleging that OSI was created to spread disinformation. By the time the reporting was thoroughly discredited, charges that the U.S. Defense Department was actively engaged in spreading propaganda had done so much damage to the reputation of the new office, as well as Douglas Feith personally, that the entire project was abandoned.

The United States Information Agency is another example of such an effort. It was folded into the State Department, its activities severely curtailed, in 1999 under Bill

¹⁷² Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 170.

¹⁷³ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision* 171.

Clinton, probably because its work rests uneasily against liberal commitment to freedom of conscience.¹⁷⁴ (John McCain, incidentally, promised to reestablish the Agency in his 2008 campaign for the Presidency.) The USIA Alumni Association website preserves the Agency's mission statement.

The mission of USIA was to understand, inform, and influence foreign publics in promotion of the U.S. national interest, and to broaden the dialogue between Americans, their institutions, and their counterparts abroad. Specifically, USIA worked:

* To explain and advocate U.S. policies in terms that are credible and meaningful in foreign cultures; [and]

* To provide information about the official policies of the United States, and about the people, values, and institutions which shape those policies.¹⁷⁵

There is, at a minimum, anecdotal evidence that such efforts can yield real results. The most prominent Pakistani diplomat in Washington DC today, and an energetic advocate of modernizing reform in his own country, Pakistan's Ambassador Husain Haqqani, credits the program as it existed under President Reagan for turning him from radical Islam. He was born to a conservative religious family in a poor part of Karachi. Growing up, he was drawn into the Muslim Brotherhood, and, in his words, "alternated between being attracted to and repulsed by political Islam."¹⁷⁶ He credits afternoons at the American library—spent reading *The Federalist Papers*, and William Buckley—with shaping a world view friendly to the United States and the West. Both USIA and Feith's OSI existed precisely to facilitate this sort of opportunity. While Haqqani was still in

¹⁷⁴ Eleanor Clift, "Obama's Subtle Diplomacy", *Newsweek*, 19 June, 2009.

<http://wwsg.com/wp-content/uploads/clift-june-2009.pdf>

¹⁷⁵ <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/2.htm>

¹⁷⁶ Paul Richter, "A Pakistani diplomat's delicate mission," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 October, 2008. <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/oct/24/world/fg-haqqani24>. cf. *Newsweek*, "Obama's Subtle Diplomacy", 19 June, 2009.

university, he was pressured by Islamists to lead an attack on the very Consulate that housed the library where he had studied. He refused and later wrote “What I never said out loud is that burning down the consulate would have wrecked the wonderful library there, and deprived me of access to all the books I found so useful for my studies in international relations.”¹⁷⁷

The remarkable Ayaan Hirsi Ali tells a similar story. Born in Somalia, she was, for a time, an ardent supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood. She participated actively in what she calls “a new kind of Islam” based on Wahhabi/Salafi ideas actively supported and disseminated by the Saudis.¹⁷⁸ She was never quite taken in by the hateful *jihadist* Islam of the most extreme adherents; and she was always sensitive to the problems implied by willing submission to a system that struck her as unjust in important respects, especially in its treatment of women. But she was a devout Muslim. On her way to Canada to be married to a man selected for her by her father, she sought asylum in Holland, and ultimately became a citizen, a Member of Parliament, as well as an outspoken critic of the treatment of women in the Islamic world and the West’s immigration policies. (She worked with Theo van Gogh on the film, *Submission*, for which the film director was assassinated in the street by a Muslim extremist, and is today a Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.)

Much as Husain Haqqani was deeply affected by his exposure to West’s intellectual heritage, so does Hirsi Ali credit the opportunity to read works proscribed by her religion

¹⁷⁷ *Newsweek*, “Obama’s Subtle Diplomacy”, 19 June, 2009.

¹⁷⁸ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 87-88.

with transforming her worldview. Her exposure to Jane Austen and even “cheap Harlequins” during her teenage years conveyed a message fundamentally alien to what she learned in religious school, one that deeply affected her: “women had a choice.”¹⁷⁹ One gets the sense that the kernel of doubt aroused in her by foreign tales of self-directed heroines confidently chasing love preventing her from ever completely submitting to the Islam she was supposed to internalize, in which the Muslim girls disappears “until there is almost no you inside you.”¹⁸⁰ Her eventual escape from a marriage arranged against her will made it possible for her to attend university in Leiden. There she was introduced to the European Enlightenment; “And here,” in her words, “this commitment to freedom took hold of me, too.”¹⁸¹

Her account of her own intellectual transformation highlights the power of ideas and therewith, the importance of ensuring individuals are exposed to alternatives in those parts of the world where intellectual life is utterly dominated by the radical Islam. Hirsi Ali writes,

Sometimes I could almost sense a little shutter clicking shut in my brain, so that I could keep reading my textbooks without struggling to align their content with my belief in Islam. Sometimes it seemed as if almost every page I read challenged me as a Muslim. Drinking wine and wearing trousers were nothing compared to reading the history of ideas.

People had contested the whole basis of the idea of God’s power on earth, and they had done it with reasoning that was beautiful and compelling. Darwin said creation stories were a fairy tale. Freud said we had power

¹⁷⁹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 79.

¹⁸⁰ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 94.

¹⁸¹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 239.

over ourselves. Spinoza said there were no miracles, no angels, no need to pray to anything outside ourselves. God was us, and nature.¹⁸²

Programs like these are important. In fact, we will return to the importance of ideas, both the particular ideas essential to liberal democracy and those that stand in its way, in Chapters 5 through 8. On a practical level, that more resources have not been devoted to similar strategies, designed to offer an alternative to radical Islam where there is little else to oppose them, represents a serious failure of the Bush administration, and especially the State department.

And yet, from the very beginning of the war, President Bush made clear he was planning to confront terrorism by affecting the conditions that sustain it in more dramatic ways than had been attempted previously. The President's 2002 State of the Union address already (if subtly) connects the spread of freedom to vanquishing terrorism. And in speech after speech leading up to the mid-September release of the *2002 National Security Strategy* (in which the administration officially lays out the rationale for encouraging democratic regime change), the President argued that we were standing at the edge of an opportunity to remake the world order for the better. Iraq represented, on the one hand, an engagement that appeared to be necessary by the gathering threat posed by Saddam Hussein's regime (and simultaneously, an engagement with the potential to deter other terrorism-sponsoring regimes), while it represented, on the other hand, a real *opportunity* to kick-start a democratic revolution in the part of the world that had thitherto proved the most resistant to modern and moderate government—an opportunity the Bush administration was looking for. That grand political reform was embarked upon in the

¹⁸² Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 239.

absence of antecedent effort at moral and intellectual reform was, no doubt, one of the greatest errors the administration could have committed.

Not just the “NeoCons”

In the lead-up to invasion, support for the most ambitious pillar of the Bush Doctrine was widespread. In fact, serious discussion of regime change in Iraq at the highest levels of government predates the Bush administration. Mounting evidence that containment was not working led Bill Clinton to sign the Iraq Liberation Act in 1998. It provided material aid to opponents of Saddam Hussein’s regime, and established as official U.S. policy the aim of regime change in Iraq. It was a bipartisan effort, passing in the Senate by unanimous vote, and in the House, 360 to 38. President Clinton made a statement that, though unobjectionable at the time, hardly squares with the contemporary Iraq narrative: “the United States favors an Iraq that offers its people freedom at home. I categorically reject arguments that this is unattainable due to Iraq’s history or its ethnic or sectarian make-up. Iraqis deserve and desire freedom like everyone else. The United States looks forward to a democratically supported regime...”¹⁸³

It is unfortunate that, as a result of a concerted and disingenuous effort to revise history, there is a need today to review the broad consensus that existed regarding the threat Saddam Hussein’s threat posed to the U.S. in the lead-up to the war’s authorization. Dozens of prominent Democrats stood alongside the Republicans who argued for

¹⁸³ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 196-197.

“regime change” in Iraq, both before and after 9/11. Some of them spoke of the threat he posed to the international order; others spoke in grand and optimistic terms of the importance of supporting freedom and democracy. Many of them had access to the same intelligence that impelled President Bush and the Department of Defense to adopt Bill Clinton’s foreign policy approach to Iraq (adding only the gumption to carry it out). It suffices to consider these statements, uttered by fair-weather supporters of intervention in Iraq, to establish that it was not the influence of some Jewish cabal or neoconservative conspiracy that led to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s regime:

Senator John Edwards:

My position is very clear: The time has come for decisive action to eliminate the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction... We know that he has chemical and biological weapons today, that he's used them in the past, and that he's doing everything he can to build more. Every day he gets closer to his long-term goal of nuclear capability.

Democracy will not spring up by itself overnight in a multi-ethnic, complicated society that's suffered under one repressive regime after another for generations. The Iraqi people deserve and need our help to rebuild their lives and to create a prosperous, thriving, open society. All Iraqis, including Sunnis, Shia and Kurds, deserve to be represented. This is not just a moral imperative. It's a security imperative. It is in America's national interest to help build an Iraq at peace with itself and its neighbors, because a democratic, tolerant and accountable Iraq will be a peaceful regional partner, and such an Iraq could serve as a model for the entire Arab world.¹⁸⁴

Senator Hillary Clinton:

In the four years since the inspectors left, intelligence reports show that Saddam Hussein has worked to rebuild his chemical and biological weapons stock, his missile delivery capability, and his nuclear program...

It is clear, however, that if left unchecked, Saddam Hussein will continue to increase his capacity to wage biological and chemical warfare, and will

¹⁸⁴ Senator John Edwards, “Remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies,” October 7, 2002.

keep trying to develop nuclear weapons. Should he succeed in that endeavor, he could alter the political and security landscape of the Middle East, which as we know all too well, effects American security.¹⁸⁵

President Clinton:

People can quarrel with whether we should have more troops in Afghanistan or internationalize Iraq or whatever, but it is incontestable that on the day I left office, there were unaccounted for stocks of biological and chemical weapon.¹⁸⁶

Sandy Berger, President Clinton's National Security Advisor:

Imagine the consequences if Saddam fails to comply and we fail to act. Saddam will be emboldened, believing the international community has lost its will. He will rebuild his arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. And some day, some way, I am certain, he will use that arsenal again, as he has ten times since 1983.¹⁸⁷

Madeleine Albright, President Clinton's Secretary of State:

No one has done what Saddam Hussein has done, or is thinking of doing. He is producing weapons of mass destruction, and he is qualitatively and quantitatively different from other dictators.¹⁸⁸

Senator Joseph Biden, ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

Saddam is in material breach of the latest UN resolution. Yesterday's damning report by the UN inspectors makes clear again Saddam's contempt for the world and it has vindicated the President's decision last fall to go to the UN. The legitimacy of the Security Council is at stake, as well as the integrity of the UN. So if Saddam does not give up those weapons of mass destruction and the Security Council does not call for the use of force, I think we have little option but to act with a larger group of willing nations, if possible, and alone if we must.¹⁸⁹

Senator Jay Rockefeller, ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee,

There has been some debate over how "imminent" a threat Iraq poses. I do believe that Iraq poses an imminent threat, but I also believe that after September 11, that question is increasingly outdated. It is in the nature of these weapons, and the way they are targeted against civilian populations, that documented capabilities and demonstrated intent may be the only

¹⁸⁵ Senator Hillary Clinton, "Address to the US Senate," October 10, 2002.

¹⁸⁶ President Bill Clinton, "Remarks on Larry King Live," July 22, 2003.

¹⁸⁷ Sandy Berger, "Town Hall Meeting on Iraq at Ohio State University," February 18, 1998.

¹⁸⁸ Madeleine Albright, "Town Hall Meeting on Iraq at Ohio State University," February 18, 1998.

¹⁸⁹ Senator Joe Biden, "Remarks at the U.S. Senate," 28 January, 2003.

warning we get. To insist on further evidence could put some of our fellow Americans at risk. Can we afford to take that chance? We cannot!¹⁹⁰

What Did Regime Change Actually Mean?

If virtually every voice of consequence agreed that Saddam Hussein's regime posed a threat that could not be tolerated post 9/11 (a threat to the U.S. for most, to the U.N.'s legitimacy in the minds of a few), we can ask what, in concrete terms, "regime change" meant to those advocating it before 9/11 and the subsequent 2003 invasion? Feith notes that there was significant disagreement within the government on this point. The State Department hoped it would not be necessary, favoring a new round of "smarter" sanctions, which would really have amounted to a renewed effort to shore up the flailing strategy to contain Saddam Hussein's regime. The CIA (though, as an intelligence gathering organization, it is not supposed to have a policy preference) favored regime change of a very narrow sort. Presciently citing a paramount concern for Iraq's stability and unease at the prospect that comprehensive regime change could yield another Shiite-dominated state in the Middle East, potentially an ally of the Iranian theocracy, the CIA advocated supporting a military coup against Saddam Hussein, what would likely have amounted to the continuation of Ba'ath party rule under a different strong man.

Feith and most of DOD under the Bush administration opposed this very limited approach for the simple reason that no such option seemed to exist at the time, and moreover, that any military or Ba'athist coup could also have had the effect of

¹⁹⁰ Senator Jay Rockefeller, Quoted in Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 357.

aggravating an already bad situation. There was little reason to expect a new dictator would rule justly, though he would certainly expect a “generous honeymoon” from a world community finally to be rid of a perennial problem. Second, could the U.S. support a new Sunni dictator if the Kurds or Shiites seized the occasion to revolt in the name of majoritarian principles? As Feith explains, “[t]he coup option would thus require either a huge leap of faith—or a complete abandonment of principles. And the likelihood of a successful coup was in any case extremely slim.”¹⁹¹

In the spring of 2001, lastly, Condoleezza Rice had presented the most ambitious option: she advocated arming Iraqi factions opposed to Saddam Hussein’s regime with the possibility of direct U.S. military engagement.

In other words, pre-9/11, no decision had been taken even though it was becoming clearer by the day that the U.S. approach to Iraq would have to change. Saddam Hussein was not cooperating with the UNMOVIC inspection structure, the sanction regime was breaking down, and it was only a matter of time before Iraqis firing daily at coalition planes enforcing the no-fly zones over Iraq hit one—what would have necessitated an immediate response. Contrary to the dominant caricature, Rumsfeld was at this point contemplating a variety of options ranging from the regime changing approaches noted above, to *much less* aggressive responses. A retaliatory bombing campaign in response to the Iraqis’ repeated targeting of coalition aircraft enforcing the no-fly zones was on the table (targeting not only the source of those attacks, but high value elements of Iraq’s military infrastructure as a deterrent). So was negotiated regime

¹⁹¹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 200-202.

change. A proposal that would have provided the Hussein family and the regime's prominent lieutenants a comfortable exile in return for the voluntary surrender of authority was already being drafted. Even a form of appeasement was being contemplated: the abandonment of the no-fly zones and direct negotiation with Saddam Hussein.

Post-9/11, in the months leading up to war, the administration's principals agreed Saddam Hussein's regime had to go if he would not leave willingly, but they could not quite agree on what form the new Iraqi regime should take. Nor was the character of the disagreement trivial: the principals could not agree on what precisely an American invasion of Iraq—if it ultimately came to it—should be designed to achieve. According to *War and Decision*, Feith and Rumsfeld had serious reservations regarding the course ultimately adopted by the President. Somewhat strangely, however, Feith does not emphasize that DOD was, in effect, challenging the President on what has become perhaps the most controversial of his decisions. Instead, he presents his disagreement as a policy dispute that pitted he and Rumsfeld against Condoleezza Rice and her staff.

In August, 2002, Rice's National Security Council contributed a paper to a Principals Committee meeting on Iraq advocating a very robust approach to democracy promotion in Iraq. The paper, entitled "Liberation Strategy for Iraq" stated the aims of regime change in terms that are now familiar.

When we move to bring about a change of regime in Iraq, we would want:

The Iraqi population to believe that they will be enfranchised politically and better off economically as a consequence of U.S. actions.

To create a democratic, unified Iraq that can be a model of good governance for the region and a strategic partner of the United States, and to describe the U.S. effort as a struggle for the Iraqi people. Such an Iraq would have [a] transforming effect on the region.

Rice recognized, moreover, that accomplishing the aims she laid out in her paper would require “*staying in significant numbers for many years to assist in a U.S.-led administration of the country.*”¹⁹²

According to Feith, Rumsfeld “bristled” upon reading the war objectives as articulated by the National Security Advisor. They thought Rice was overstating both the extent to which the U.S. should be committed to leaving behind a functioning liberal democracy, and the extent to which the U.S. could help build such a regime. Though the Pentagon had made the strongest case for social and political reform in the Middle East in the nearly eleven months between 9/11 and the circulation of the first draft of Rice’s Liberation Strategy memo—recall that Feith goes so far as to criticize State and the CIA for their ambivalence on these aspects of Iraq—somewhat counter-intuitively, as the war plan for Iraq was being solidified it was Feith and Rumsfeld who argued that it would be inappropriate to commit the U.S. to so ambitious an undertaking. The most striking passage in this regard occurs midway through Feith’s chapter on Iraq Planning:

The statement that the United States aimed to create democracy in Iraq struck both Rumsfeld and me as off base. The proper way to think about this, we believed, was that the Iraqis would have to *create their own democracy*; the United States should not undertake to do it for them. Democracy in Iraq, if it were possible, would be highly desirable. But we wanted President Bush to clarify that the measure of success of his regime change policy would be whether we ended the dangers posed by Iraq—WMD, support for terrorism, threats against neighbors, and tyranny...

¹⁹² My Emphasis. Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 284-5.

I commented to Rumsfeld that Rice's emphatic language about promoting democracy reflected the intensity of the President's commitment to the idea. But that was not a reason, we agreed, to say that America's success depended on whether Iraq became a model democracy. It would be dangerous to measure the success of our war effort against an accomplishment it was beyond our ability to guarantee.¹⁹³

Reflective though it was of the President's own enthusiasm to promote democracy abroad, Rice's paper was not well received. Rumsfeld thought it lacked rigor and asked that it be rewritten with more emphasis on *American* interests potentially achievable by war in Iraq, and less on the democratization aspect of regime change. Vice President Cheney agreed with the basic thrust of Rumsfeld's argument: the regime would be Iraqis', and therefore, it should be up to them to determine its structure and laws, though the U.S. could certainly insist that it be basically democratic. On Feith's recollection, he went furthest of all, proposing that the term "democracy" be left out of the rewritten paper altogether.¹⁹⁴ Most important to Rumsfeld, Feith, and Cheney: the new regime must not pose the threat to the United States Saddam Hussein had. The elimination of the threat he posed—something they believed was not likely to be achieved by any approach short of regime change—ought nonetheless be the guiding aim of intervention and the sole measure of its success. In this, they were gravitating toward a more traditionally realist understanding of a country's projection of military force, even if it remained unclear what precisely the new Iraqi regime would have to look like in order to achieve these narrower aims.

¹⁹³ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 285.

¹⁹⁴ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 288.

Early Talk of Modern and Moderate Government in the Middle East

On August 30, 2002, Rice's staff circulated a separate paper regarding the ultimatum strategy mentioned briefly above. This approach was consistent with the overall goal—regime change—but hoped to achieve it without having to resort to war. Saddam Hussein and top Ba'ath party officials would be given the opportunity to live freely in exile so long as they left Iraq and surrendered political authority voluntarily. In this paper, too, Rice defined “regime change” more ambitiously than any of the other principals. As Feith recounts, “The paper went on to say that the only way to achieve all the war's purposes was ‘through a pluralistic, democratic, representative government.’”¹⁹⁵

Two months later, on October 29, 2002, a rewritten and unclassified version of the original Liberation Strategy paper Rumsfeld and Feith had criticized for its audacity more than two months before was again circulated to the principals. It begins by listing goals incontrovertibly related to the U.S. national interest: an Iraq that does not threaten its neighbors, support terrorism, or develop WMD. Nonetheless, the lead section of the paper devotes even more space to a description of the sort of a regime it was becoming U.S. policy to help establish: a “unitary state” that

- No longer oppresses or tyrannizes its people;
- Respects the basic rights of all Iraqis—including women and minorities;
- Adheres to the rule of law and respects fundamental human rights, including freedom of speech and worship; and
- Encourages the building of democratic institutions.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 304.

¹⁹⁶ “Revised Rice Memo,” Available in Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*.

On the realization that responsibility for governing Iraq would fall to the U.S. military once the Ba'ath regime was ousted, Feith insists that he and Rumsfeld worked to diminish expectations so as not to overpromise dangerously. He quotes from the this same declassified memo to show that, contra Rice's earlier enthusiasm for building a liberal democracy in Iraq, the Pentagon persuaded the National Security Council ultimately to adopt a more moderate approach, committing the U.S. to providing an *opportunity* for Iraqis to build a democracy *of their own*: "The new version dropped the phrase 'establish a broad-based democratic government' and substituted a more realistic formula: 'establishes an interim administration in Iraq that prepares for the transition to an elected Iraqi government as quickly as practicable.'"197

Unfortunately, Feith is less than fully forthcoming in this effort to portray the Department of Defense as the voice of caution when it came to articulating war aims for Iraq.

Although his argument begins with the words "instead of defining *the U.S. goal* as 'a society based on moderation, pluralism, and democracy'" (as the previous draft of Rice's memo had), to prove it he quotes not from the new memo's eight-point "U.S. Goals" section, but from the "Strategy" section that follows it. In discussing this statement of "the administration's 'goals and objectives for Iraq,'" (Feith's words) not only does he skip over the democratization goals explicitly stated in the revised memo (noted above); he also extricates this important strategy line:

- Work with the Iraqis opposed to the regime that [sic] share our vision for Iraq.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 319.

¹⁹⁸ "Revised Rice Memo"

Near the end of his book, Feith argues that “the Administration tried to change the subject” when WMD stockpiles were not discovered in Iraq, in essence, that democratization was more of a *post hoc* justification for war, but not a driving factor.¹⁹⁹ He goes on to suggest the Bush administration was damaged by its failure to aggressively argue that war was justified on national interest grounds as it became less likely WMD stockpiles would be discovered. While it is certainly true that the democracy promotion aspect of the strategy gained increased rhetorical salience in the latter part of 2003 and afterward,²⁰⁰ it seems disingenuous to suggest it was not an important, if a controversial, war aim from the beginning. For the first half of his book, Feith himself emphasizes the importance of “changing the way they live” to confronting the problem of terrorism over the long term, going so far as to denigrate the CIA/State Department approach to terrorism and Iraq for not devoting enough attention to this question. The very memo he underlines to support his contention that democracy-promotion was scaled back as a war aim at the behest of DOD, read in its entirety, places a much greater emphasis on building a liberal democracy in Iraq than he allows (or volunteers), even in its revised form. Moreover, the approach Feith and Rumsfeld favored—creating the opening or opportunity for Iraqis to build a democracy of their own without making it U.S. foreign policy to help much—would likely have exacerbated the problems encountered during the occupation and reconstruction of Iraq. If one thing is clear in retrospect, it is that

¹⁹⁹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 477.

²⁰⁰ Only two presidential speeches (of 9 that discussed the justification for the Iraq war) prior to July, 2003, place a greater emphasis on democracy-promotion than Saddam Hussein’s threat to U.S. and international security. cf. Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 476.

Iraqis needed *more*, not less, guidance than the U.S. ultimately provided if the goal was to establish a stable and functioning democracy on the ashes of the Ba'athist regime.

Chapters 2 and 3 argue that a failure to understand liberal democracy—in particular, what our form of government requires of its citizens—and especially DOD's failure to internalize the scope and nature of the task the President had settled on, is one of the main reasons Iraq's reconstruction was beset by such violence and has yielded unending political paralysis.

Perhaps the most important evidence that the U.S. was in fact committed from an early date to establishing a recognizably democratic regime in Iraq are the President's own policy statements and speeches, both pre- and post-invasion. They reveal the outcome of the debate among the principals on the question of what emphasis to place on democracy promotion in much starker terms than Feith is willing to admit. The soaring rhetoric of the 2005 Second Inaugural Address certainly, but long before this, the 2002 State of the Union Address, speeches at the Inter-American Development Bank (March, 2002), in Berlin (May, 2002), at West Point (June, 2002), and to the *American Enterprise Institute* (February, 2003) all place early emphasis on the important relationship between spreading freedom and democracy and the U.S. National Interest. The *National Security Strategy* released a full month prior to the circulation of Rice's revised Memo (September, 2002) makes America's commitment to "create a balance of power that favors human freedom" the centerpiece of the country's international strategy; the statement prefacing it, signed by the President, devotes eight paragraphs to a discussion of democracy promotion and only three to the threat posed by "the crossroads of radicalism and

technology.”²⁰¹ Add to this Paul Bremer’s oft-stated understanding of his own task in Iraq, and the Iraqi and Afghan constitutions yielded by the approach here articulated—taken together, the record clearly demonstrates that Rice’s view ultimately prevailed, at least to the extent her office’s position aligns most closely with the Bush administration’s public statements of its war aims.

Indeed, the debates relayed in *War and Decision*, many of them very impressive, seem to striking extent oblivious to the President’s public policy statements on the topic of U.S. foreign policy. The Office of the President, *articulating the national security strategy of the United States of America*, did indeed define its goals for Iraq incredibly broadly, committing America in the public imagination and on the world stage to transforming not only Iraq’s regime, but the entire region.

In a stirring speech delivered to the American Enterprise Institute and its supporters on 26 February, 2003, a speech recognized at the time for its importance (but which Feith does not once cite from in his book), the President’s references to the benefits of a free and democratic Iraq outnumber his references to the threat posed by its WMD program by more than two to one. Operation Iraqi Freedom commenced only a few weeks after this address, on 19 March, 2003. It is worth recalling at some length the terms in which the case for regime change in Iraq was being in the period leading up to war.

We hope that the Iraqi regime will meet the demands of the United Nations and disarm, fully and peacefully. If it does not, we are prepared to disarm Iraq by force. Either way, this danger will be removed.

²⁰¹ The White House, “2002 National Security Strategy of the United States.”

The safety of the American people depends on ending this direct and growing threat. Acting against the danger will also contribute greatly to the long-term safety and stability of our world. The current Iraqi regime has shown the power of tyranny to spread discord and violence in the Middle East. *A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform that vital region, by bringing hope and progress into the lives of millions. America's interests in security, and America's belief in liberty, both lead in the same direction: to a free and peaceful Iraq.*

The first to benefit from a free Iraq would be the Iraqi people, themselves. Today they live in scarcity and fear, under a dictator who has brought them nothing but war, and misery, and torture. Their lives and their freedom matter little to Saddam Hussein -- but Iraqi lives and freedom matter greatly to us.

Bringing stability and unity to a free Iraq will not be easy. Yet that is no excuse to leave the Iraqi regime's torture chambers and poison labs in operation. Any future the Iraqi people choose for themselves will be better than the nightmare world that Saddam Hussein has chosen for them.

[...]

The United States has no intention of determining the precise form of Iraq's new government. That choice belongs to the Iraqi people. Yet, we will ensure that one brutal dictator is not replaced by another. All Iraqis must have a voice in the new government, and all citizens must have their rights protected.

Rebuilding Iraq will require a sustained commitment from many nations, including our own: we will remain in Iraq as long as necessary, and not a day more. America has made and kept this kind of commitment before -- in the peace that followed a world war. After defeating enemies, we did not leave behind occupying armies, we left constitutions and parliaments. We established an atmosphere of safety, in which responsible, reform-minded local leaders could build lasting institutions of freedom. In societies that once bred fascism and militarism, liberty found a permanent home.

There was a time when many said that the cultures of Japan and Germany were incapable of sustaining democratic values. Well, they were wrong. Some say the same of Iraq today. They are mistaken. The nation of Iraq - - with its proud heritage, abundant resources and skilled and educated people -- is fully capable of moving toward democracy and living in freedom.

The world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values, because stable and free nations do not breed the ideologies of murder. They encourage the peaceful pursuit of a better life. And there are hopeful signs of a desire for freedom in the Middle East. Arab intellectuals have called on Arab governments to address the "freedom gap" so their peoples can fully share in the progress of our times. Leaders in the region speak of a new Arab charter that champions internal reform, greater politics participation, economic openness, and free trade.

And from Morocco to Bahrain and beyond, nations are taking genuine steps toward politics reform. A new regime in Iraq would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region.

It is presumptuous and insulting to suggest that a whole region of the world -- or the one-fifth of humanity that is Muslim -- is somehow untouched by the most basic aspirations of life. Human cultures can be vastly different. Yet the human heart desires the same good things, everywhere on Earth. In our desire to be safe from brutal and bullying oppression, human beings are the same. In our desire to care for our children and give them a better life, we are the same. For these fundamental reasons, freedom and democracy will always and everywhere have greater appeal than the slogans of hatred and the tactics of terror.

[...]

Much is asked of America in this year 2003. The work ahead is demanding. It will be difficult to help freedom take hold in a country that has known three decades of dictatorship, secret police, internal divisions, and war. *It will be difficult to cultivate liberty and peace in the Middle East, after so many generations of strife. Yet, the security of our nation and the hope of millions depend on us, and Americans do not turn away from duties because they are hard.* We have met great tests in other times, and we will meet the tests of our time.

We go forward with confidence, because we trust in the power of human freedom to change lives and nations. By the resolve and purpose of America, and of our friends and allies, we will make this an age of progress and liberty. Free people will set the course of history, and free people will keep the peace of the world.²⁰²

The AEI speech did not mark an abrupt shift in U.S. foreign policy either. It elaborated an idea that had been gathering momentum for more than a year: in the long term, combating terrorism would require a significant commitment to spreading freedom, democracy, and economic development. On 14 March, 2002, the President stated:

This growing divide between wealth and poverty, between opportunity and misery, is both a challenge to our compassion and a source of instability. We must confront it. We must include every African, every Asian, every Latin American, every Muslim, in an expanding circle of development.

²⁰² My emphasis. President Bush, "Remarks at the American Enterprise Institute." 26 February, 2003.

The advance of development is a central commitment of American foreign policy. As a nation founded on the dignity and value of every life, America's heart breaks because of the suffering and senseless death we see in our world. We work for prosperity and opportunity because they're right. It's the right thing to do. We also work for prosperity and opportunity because they help defeat terror.

[...]

Development provides the resources to build hope and prosperity, and security.

[...]

Meeting this commitment is expensive, but securing peace and freedom is never too expensive.²⁰³

In a speech to the German Parliament on 23 May, 2002, thanking Germans for their enthusiastic cooperation in the war against terrorism, the President espoused a loftiness of purpose rivaling even Barack Obama's 2008 campaign address in Berlin:

We must recognize that violence and resentment are defeated by the advance of health, and learning, and prosperity. Poverty doesn't create terror -- yet, terror takes root in failing nations that cannot police themselves or provide for their people. Our conscience and our interests speak as one: to achieve a safer world, we must create a better world.

[...]

Members of the Bundestag, we are joined in serious purpose -- very serious purposes -- on which the safety of our people and the fate of our freedom now rest. We build a world of justice, or we will live in a world of coercion.²⁰⁴

Earlier yet, in February of 2002 (more than a year before the war began), he dismissed French reluctance to support escalation in Iraq by underlining the grandeur of his policy's ambition:

²⁰³ President George Bush, "Remarks to the Inter-American Development Bank," 14 March, 2002.

²⁰⁴ President George Bush, "Remarks in Berlin," 23 May, 2002.

History has given us a unique opportunity to defend freedom. And we're going to seize the moment, and do it.²⁰⁵

The President reiterated his commitment to spread the blessings of liberty the following month:

We understand history has called us into action, and we are not going to miss that opportunity to make the world more peaceful and more free.²⁰⁶

As the President makes clear throughout the Berlin address and in the months leading up to it, he viewed the war on terror as an opportunity to remake the world order. Much as World War II transformed a continent, ushering in an era of peaceful cooperation among the great powers, so the President expresses the hope that the present war would impact international relations in as fundamental and durable a manner as the political transformation of Germany and Japan—the democratization of those two countries—had. He makes multiple references to “great trans-Atlantic alliance of democracies” shaped by “the generation of our fathers,” ending his address by announcing for our generation a similar embarkation: “we are building a house of freedom for our time and for all time.”

In a moving speech at West Point the same Spring, the President again invoked WWII and its system-transforming legacy. A shared devotion to the values of liberalism makes it possible for the great powers to compete in peace instead of war. The military prowess of the Western powers extended a “deep commitment to human freedom,” uniting nations that had for centuries been antagonists. Eisenhower, MacArthur, Patton and

²⁰⁵ President George Bush, “President Bush, Prime Minister Koizumi Hold Press Conference,” White House press release, February 18, 2002, 6.

²⁰⁶ President George Bush, “President, Vice President Discuss the Middle East,” White House press release, March 21, 2002, 2.

Bradley were West Point officers and, in the President's words, "the commanders who saved a civilization" and "lived to see a world transformed." He goes on to exhort graduates: "History has also issued its call to your generation." That call: "we have a great opportunity to extend a just peace by replacing poverty, repression, and resentment around the world with hope of a better day."²⁰⁷

As clearly as in any later address, the President makes clear in the West Point speech that the United States would no longer follow a traditionally realist foreign policy. A distinguishing feature of a realist is that his actions are calculated to advance the national interest, even when they require amoral or even immoral action. As Hans Morgenthau explains in *Politics Among Nations*, an individual has a 'moral right' to sacrifice himself or his interests to do what is right. The state, however, "has no right to let its moral disapprobation of the infringement of liberty get in the way of successful political action, itself inspired by the moral principle of national survival."²⁰⁸ Put another way, "the political realist is not unaware of the existence of standards of thought other than political ones. As political realist, he cannot but subordinate these other standards to those of politics." Actions that transgress the moral standards one expects to prevail within a decent society cannot always guide the men charged with defending that society and thereby, the way of life it permits or even exists to promote.

²⁰⁷ President George Bush, "Remarks at West Point," 2 June, 2002.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/02/world/us-must-act-first-to-battle-terror-bush-tells-cadets.html>

²⁰⁸ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 10.

The President makes his half-disagreement with the realist school quite clear in the West Point address: “Some worry that it is somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right and wrong. I disagree. Different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities.”²⁰⁹ He does not hereby dispute that under some circumstances, the national interest will demand the abrogation of moral considerations. His idealism is not irresponsible; he never advocates compromising America’s interests for the sake of justice or right however conceived. But he does argue that interest and morality can, under some circumstances, be united, *even that a nation dedicated to America’s guiding principles looks for such opportunities*. Inspiringly, the President insisted that there need not be a disproportion between power and justice where the world’s most powerful nation is bound to America’s noble creed:

I am certain of this: Wherever we carry it, the American flag will stand not only for our power, but for freedom. Our nation’s cause has always been larger than our nation’s defense. We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace—a peace that favors human liberty... And we will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.²¹⁰

The President believed the war on terror represented an opportunity to unite interest and morality because, in the long run, it would present an opportunity to disseminate freedom and prosperity—thereby transforming the way states interact with one another, as well as the character of their most dangerous citizens. Nor was this a ludicrous idea. WWII was tragic not only because millions died; it was also, as Churchill wanted to name it, the “unnecessary war,” insofar as it could well have been prevented by preemptive action in the decade leading up to overt Nazi aggression. And yet, unprecedented destruction

²⁰⁹ President George Bush, “Remarks at West Point,” 2 June, 2002.

²¹⁰ President George Bush, “Remarks at West Point,” 2 June, 2002.

yielded a half-century of unprecedented cooperation and prosperity in the Western world. That the President imagined a similar triumph might be wrested from the war on terror is indicated by what may well be the most ambitious phrase, the most audacious lines, he has uttered through his eight years in office. They were spoken for the first time in his West Point speech, and repeated, not inconsequentially, in the 2002 National Security Strategy, the most official statement of the nation's foreign policy and the rationale behind it: "As we defend the peace, we also have an historic opportunity to preserve the peace. We have our best chance since the rise of the nation state in the 17th century to build a world where great powers compete in peace instead of prepare for war."²¹¹

It would be a mistake to dismiss the President's words as mere rhetorical overstatement. As we will see, members of the Bush Administration as well as its most prominent supporters in the academy laid out an audacious Grand Strategy that aimed at nothing less than the transformation of the international system. This is not to say the primary reason for war in Iraq was to begin some democratic experiment. But democratizing the Middle East was always a guiding, if coordinate, aim of that intervention.

And yet, precisely because the Bush administration put such emphasis on something so ambitious—the establishment of a constitutional democracy in the heart of the part of the world historically most resistant to it—the perceived success of the enterprise is and will remain inextricably tied to the emergence of modern and moderate government in Iraq and the region. Somewhat perversely, however, neither the State Department nor the Department of Defense worked very hard to elaborate a war plan effectively tailored to

²¹¹ President George Bush, "Remarks at West Point," 2 June, 2002.

accomplishing these goals. Before we turn to an examination of the strategy as its architects understood it, let us turn back to the dispute going on within the Administration in the year leading up to war.

DOD versus the White House?

In light of the speeches the President was delivering—and which Feith hardly cites or acknowledges—the gulf between the discussions going on at the Department of Defense (the agency charged with directing military operations to achieve a given foreign policy objective), and the discussions going on at the White House (where the strategic aims themselves are ultimately finalized after interagency dialogue), is nothing short of astonishing. Perhaps the most revealing admission in *War and Decision* is Feith's account of his reaction to a prominent Iraq speech delivered at the United Nations on 12 September, 2002:

I always felt some tension in watching a speech by the President, because we in the Pentagon did not necessarily know in advance what he would say. Although Presidential speeches on national security were important policy statements, they were produced not through Deputies, Principals, and National Security Council meetings, but by the President's speechwriters, in coordination with the National Security Advisor and other White House officials. Rice usually sent Rumsfeld a draft of a presidential speech for comment a few days (or occasionally a few hours) before it was scheduled for delivery. Rumsfeld usually gave the draft to Wolfowitz and me, and we would give him our comments to pass back to Rice. Sometimes I recognized the ideas in the draft speech from policy papers. Sometimes, however, the ideas had not been discussed in interagency meetings; they may have been developed by the President, Rice, or another official—or they may have originated with the speechwriters themselves. The speechwriters sometimes heeded our comments, especially factual corrections, but they often resisted suggestions about themes or presentation. When it came to crafting the President's

public statements—often his most important articulations of policy—even the most productive interagency policy discussions amounted to little more than suggestions to the speechwriters, that they could either take or leave.²¹²

Perhaps out of decorum, Feith makes less of this passage than the reader is apt to. But this is a truly astounding revelation: the war aims settled upon by the President of the United States—articulated by the Commander and Chief in public speeches and policy statements—sometimes came as a surprise to the highest-ranking officials at the Departments of Defense and State, the men who would be in charge of deploying military and diplomatic tools to achieve them! Nor is Feith alone in his criticism of White House speechwriters (and thereby the office of the President) on this subject. It emerged to some fanfare, only days after the President’s 2002 State of the Union address, that high-ranking State Department were “stunned” by its saber-rattling tone, especially the phrase “axis of evil,” and that many had not seen a draft.²¹³ Not even Secretary of State Colin Powell saw the final draft of the speech before the President delivered it. It is well known that Powell set immediately to work downplaying suggestions that the speech was a harbinger to preemptive strikes against Iran, Iraq, and/or North Korea.²¹⁴ That State and Defense were not always in the foreign policy “loop” is not a small charge.

Feith’s official complaint is, unsurprisingly, more restrained. He suggests the President did too little to combat disingenuous criticism of the war’s rationale as it became increasingly clear WMD stockpiles would not be discovered. He insists, rightly, that the

²¹² Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 309.

²¹³ Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 145. cf. Tony Karon, “Tough Talking Bush Rattles Friend and Foe,” *Time*, 2 February 2002. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,198753,00.html>

²¹⁴ Peter Galbraith, *The End of Iraq*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 71.

WMD justification remained in tact as a legitimate *casus belli*; it was always claimed that Saddam Hussein posed a *gathering* threat, a claim that was not refuted but rather confirmed after the invasion. Feith argues that the Bush administration ought to have more forcefully emphasized this point, that by giving up defending the WMD rationale, he incentivized the virulent and false criticisms that so damagingly affected his credibility. In short, Feith argues that a public relations failure accounts for a good deal of the public's loss of patience with the war in Iraq. He goes on to posit that the democracy promotion rationale was emphasized later in "a radical shift in Administration rhetoric," the result of an explicit effort to "change the subject." As he put it in one memo, it looked as though the President appeared to be "rewriting history" and "chang[ing] the definition of success." Near the end of his book, he goes so far as to charge "the President's shift in rhetoric could cost the United States the war."²¹⁵

And yet, to make this charge Feith himself has to reinterpret history to no small degree. We know that the democratization rationale was discussed and debated from the very beginning at the Pentagon and the White House; Feith himself recounts discussions centered upon "changing the way they live" dating back to September 2001. We know, moreover, that the President has been discussing publicly the importance to U.S. security of spreading freedom and development since at least February of 2002; promoting "moderate and modern government, especially in the Middle East" was, as we have seen, a central tenet of the *National Security Strategy* released by the White House in August of 2002. It is impossible to deny that the administration saw a clear and important link

²¹⁵ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 477, 493, 521-22.

between democratization in the Middle East and U.S. national security, between spreading freedom and development, and winning the war on terror.

Though Feith makes little of it, important Pentagon officials shared this view. Somewhat surprisingly, Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz almost fades into the background of *War and Decision*, especially in the debates concerning democracy-promotion as foreign policy.

Feith does hint, however, that he, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz did not always agree. He recalls frequent discussions about “the importance of balancing U.S. interests in promoting democracy abroad with our other interests,” and goes on to add,

We sometimes disagreed on how much weight to give the various interests, but none of us insisted that democracy promotion necessarily took precedence over all the other U.S. interests.²¹⁶

And yet, he gives no account of Wolfowitz’ precise contribution to those discussion, nor presents any principal at DOD as a strong proponent of dedicating the U.S. to building a democratic regime in Iraq post-invasion. It is hard not to conclude that Wolfowitz was the one disagreeing with Feith and Rumsfeld on this question; the informed reader knows well that Wolfowitz more than any other principal was an enthusiastic promoter of helping to disseminate freedom and development in the Middle East. Speaking to the question at issue specifically—what U.S. aims informed the decision to go to war in Iraq—Wolfowitz offered a revealing explanation in *Vanity Fair* only a few months after the invasion commenced, in May of 2003. (Lest it be argued that Wolfowitz was not speaking for Rumsfeld and DOD, it bears noting that interview was published on the Defense Department website.)

²¹⁶ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 237.

The truth is that for reasons that have a lot to do with the U.S. government bureaucracy we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on which was weapons of mass destruction as the core reason, but... there have always been three fundamental concerns. One is weapons of mass destruction, the second is support for terrorism, the third is the criminal treatment of the Iraqi people. Actually I guess you could say there's a fourth overriding one which is the connection between the first two.²¹⁷

In other words, important voices in the Bush administration supported the invasion for a variety of reasons. Stanching the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's WMD program in a post-9/11 world was simply the one they agreed constituted the most pressing *casus belli*. Not unimportantly, it also justified invasion on the grounds of international law.

Feith is well aware of all of this. He references many of these speeches even if he declines to cite from them; he writes, "As I saw it, the purpose of a Defense Department strategy was to fulfill the *national strategy*" (Feith's emphasis) and yet, not once, does he cite from the *2002 National Security Strategy of the United States*.²¹⁸ *War and Decision* treats democratization as an important, coordinate, aim of the war, an opportunity presented by the dismantling of Saddam Hussein's regime though not its primary cause. This is surely true. And yet Feith goes further than this at times, consistently trying to distance his department from the emphasis the President was placing on helping to build modern and moderate government in the Middle East.

Feith's more serious charge is therefore made somewhat obliquely. The suggestion seems to be that the war's objectives as stated by the Commander and Chief were framed and presented to the public without sufficient input from, or deference to, the department

²¹⁷ Douglas Feith, Interview in Vanity Fair, 9 May, 2003. (published on the U.S. Department of Defense Website: <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/2003/tr20030509-depsecdef0223.html>)

²¹⁸ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 509.

that would be charged with attaining them. This is no small accusation. To charge that speechwriters had more influence over foreign policy in this respect than Pentagon officials—at one point he comments that he objected to the prominence of the democracy rhetoric in the draft of a May 2004 Presidential address “without great hope of persuading the speechwriting team”—indicates a serious disjuncture between the President’s rhetoric on Iraq and what military planners, civilian and soldier alike, believed could realistically be achieved.²¹⁹ It may also explain, in part, the inadequacy of their preparations.

We can say, then, without a doubt that enthusiasm for promoting democracy in Iraq and abroad was concentrated in the White House. There may even be some truth to the charge that renegade speechwriters, supported by a small coterie around Condoleezza Rice, were exerting undue policy influence. And yet, it would be too much to say they had hijacked the process for it must be acknowledged that they had the support of the President. David Frum, a speechwriter close to the President for his first year in office, made this stunning admission on the subject of democracy promotion in a 2007 interview with *Vanity Fair*:

I always believed as a speechwriter that if you could persuade the president to commit himself to certain words, he would feel himself committed to the ideas that underlay those words. And the big shock to me has been that, although the president said the words, he just did not absorb the ideas. And that is the root of, maybe, everything.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 492.

²²⁰ “The Neoconservative Blame Game,” *Vanity Fair*, 5 November, 2006. www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2006/12/neocons200612

Frum helped penned the phrase “axis of evil,” what may well remain the single most memorable, and controversial, phrase President Bush uttered in eight years. White House speechwriters and the President’s senior advisors undoubtedly bear considerable responsibility for the ambitious, even grandiose, terms used to elaborate Iraq policy. The notion that victory in Iraq would be measured by the establishment of a strong, unified, constitutional democracy became commonplace as a result. Unfortunately, the resources of the U.S. government—military and intellectual, and which speechwriters and White House advisors do not directly control—were never fully marshaled to achieve the result the government committed itself to. The neoconservatives who were the strategy’s most enthusiastic supporters have since blamed the Bush Administration (not only the President himself, but Tommy Franks and Donald Rumsfeld especially) for their failure to implement it intelligently.

Feith turns this criticism on its head and instead goes so far as (subtly) to blame the President for misrepresenting his own administration’s real Iraq aim. What is not altogether certain is whether the incongruity Feith decries is really the result of a public relations failure, a consequence of clever and overzealous speechwriters who were unwilling to articulate official policy and who succeeded in duping the President of the United States into articulating their vision for Iraq instead of his own administration’s. It seems equally plausible that the Department of Defense simply lost the argument. Perhaps democratizing the Middle East was emphasized not because the speechwriters slipped the language in over the objections of DOD principals, but because the President

and Condoleezza Rice were never persuaded to adopt the reticent, cautious, approach Feith attributes to Pentagon planners.

Feith sometimes speaks as though, when it comes to foreign policy, the President of the United States is the mouthpiece for policies developed by the Department of Defense, as though when the President emphasized democracy-promotion he was mischaracterizing American aims. In doing so he risks overstating the policy role of the Pentagon. The Secretary Defense is a member of the National Security Council, but so is the Secretary of State, the Vice President, the President. President Bush no doubt took seriously the suggestions of every member of the NSC. Ultimately, however, his voice is determinative on matters of U.S. foreign policy. At that point, it is up to every agency to pursue its determined aim with complete commitment to its success. Feith himself notes in the “lessons learned” conclusion to his book that “large projects—such as war—require cooperation among many government agencies. If a President takes the nation to war, he needs to make a strategy and forge a team that will implement it. If he cannot, the various agencies will work at cross purposes.”²²¹ In this case, one or both elements were lacking. Whether the President was misarticulating the policy settled on by the National Security Council, or the Pentagon mistaken as to the official strategy in Iraq, this fact is clear: there *was* a disconnect between military ends and means, and it would prove responsible for many of the administration’s biggest mistakes in Iraq.

²²¹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 518-519.

Democratic Peace Theory

Thus, there can be no doubt but that the President vowed to attack the problem of terrorism at its so-called root. By promoting the spread of political and economic freedom, by promoting “moderate and modern government, especially in the Muslim world,” the Bush administration hoped to “ensure that the conditions and ideologies that promote terrorism do not find fertile ground in any nation.”²²² In the terms of the *NSS*, prosperous nations, in which the people value “political and economic freedom,” will develop “peaceful relations with other states”; nations in which men and women “respect human dignity,” do not typically support or produce terrorists.²²³ The heart of the argument, then, is this: religious fanaticism—the real root of Islamist terrorism—does not flourish in societies devoted to freedom and economic opportunity. Historically, it is exceedingly rare that the two exist in the same place at the same time.

It is often said that “Democratic Peace Theory” is the theoretical foundation of the Bush Doctrine. The historical fact that the Western democracies have never gone to war with one another suggests that something about their form of government discourages a rush to arms.²²⁴ First articulated by Michael Doyle in 1983,²²⁵ commentators have since referred to the apparent relationship between pacifism and democracy as “the closest

²²² The White House, “2002 National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” 6.

²²³ The White House, “2002 National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” 7.

²²⁴ Michael Doyle, “Liberalism and World Politics,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (Dec, 1986), 1151-1169.

²²⁵ Michael Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,” Parts I and II, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1983), pp. 1151-1169; and No. 4 (Fall 1983), pp. 323-353.

thing we have to a law in international politics.”²²⁶ Those who have studied the phenomenon have found that our inclination to settle disputes peaceably in the West is very real, but the theory accounting for it, unfortunately named. It is not democracy in the strict sense of the term—citizens’ widespread popular participation in government through elections and representation, and the government’s responsibility to the electorate—that accounts for the neighborliness of the modern Western democracies. (In fact, studies have shown persuasively that democratizing countries are more likely to go to war with their neighbors, more likely to oppress minorities or violate human rights, and more likely to perpetrate mass killings of civilians.)²²⁷ Rather, it is something about the people, the citizenry, being represented that accounts for their states’ neighborliness. The Western democracies do not exist peacefully with one another because they are democracies, but rather, because they are *liberal* democracies.

What is so determinative about liberalism, then? John M. Owen, seeking to uncover “a causal mechanism preventing democracies from going to war against one another,” demonstrated in 1994 that “it is the liberal ideas undergirding liberal democracies” that explain their pacifist tendencies vis a vis other *liberal* democracies.²²⁸ In other terms, the purpose of a regime affects how it interacts with other, similar, regimes. Because liberal democracies are self-consciously devoted to securing the lives, freedoms, and property of

²²⁶ Jack S. Levy, “Domestic Politics and War,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (1988), pp. 653-673.

²²⁷ The studies are summarized in Arthur A. Goldsmith, “Making the World Safe for Partial Democracy?: Questioning the Premises of Democracy Promotion,” *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Fall 2008), 132.

²²⁸ John M. Owen, “How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994), 123.

individual citizens, the regimes tend to be (and would prefer to be) status quo powers. Where revisionist powers seek to expand their power, often by extending their borders, a status quo power prefers peace, and is willing to accept and even defend the international system as it stands in order to achieve it. This disposition has very much to do with the character of democratic citizens. Defending a citizenry's right pursue happiness as defined by the individual scarcely ever requires interfering violently with regimes devoted to those same ends; in fact, the guiding national purpose of a liberal democracy is antithetical to conquest for the sake of gain or glory. (Never has there been a state so troubled by the projection of power—even to advance its legitimate national interests!—as America is today.) Because war threatens lives, liberties, and property—the very things liberal democracies exist to protect—liberal democrats rarely engage in wars of choice. Only the most compelling necessity (or perception thereof) upends this disposition. And when liberal democracies do go to war, it is almost always with states that are not liberal-democracies, but rather totalitarian regimes with expansionist ambitions.

Put another way, liberal democracies are good neighbors because their guiding purpose is best achieved under conditions of geopolitical stability. Financial contracts and civil liberties—and the generous freedom of action they require—are most durable in times of peace. Once established, moreover, security can be enjoyed in common by states disposed to value it; security is a sharable good so long as every power is satisfied with the status quo. Because liberal democracies achieve the purpose of their existence under these conditions, the interests of liberal democracies coincide more often than they

collide. We have more to gain by cooperating than by competing militarily. Of course, perceptions matter a great deal. As John M. Owen observes,

Once liberals accept a foreign state as a liberal democracy, they adamantly oppose war against that state. The rationale follows from liberal premises. *Ceteris paribus*, people are better off without war, because it is costly and dangerous. War is called for only when it would serve liberal ends—i.e., when it would most likely enhance self-preservation and well-being. This can only be the case when the adversary is not a liberal democracy. Liberal democracies are believed reasonable, predictable, and trustworthy, because they are governed by their citizens' true interests, which harmonize with all individuals' true interests around the world.²²⁹

On this rationale, liberal democracies would prefer never to intervene abroad. Indeed, in the history of the modern world, late intervention has arguably been a more costly foreign policy error than unnecessary intervention. Of course, it would be too much to say liberal democracies always and infallibly act as status quo powers. But where they attempt to affect or transform the international system, to alter its balance of power, they do so in the hope of stabilizing it, of containing aggressive actors, even of turning revisionist powers into status quo powers. A clear example of status quo powers pushed to military confrontation with an expansionist state in order to defend the status quo is the First Gulf War. They do not indulge expansionist or imperial ambitions; they oppose them.

Stanching such threats effectively can only be accomplished by transforming the regime in question. This, then, is the insight that lies at the heart of democratic peace theory. Something about liberal democratic *mores*—the guiding opinions and social habits of the regime—can actually transform a state into a status quo power once internalized by the

²²⁹ John M. Owen, "How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace," 95.

citizenry. By transforming the way citizenry's conceive of their interests where the people control the government, the incentives that have traditionally driven states to armed conflict—gain, glory, and self-defense—operate differently. The desire for gain and glory cease to catalyze wars among liberal democracies. What remains, a state's concern to secure its way of life, can still today drive a democratic people to war, but the character of their participation is different.

Gain. Tocqueville observed almost two hundred years ago that the spread of democratic ideas and *mores* will lead to the intertwining of interests. Commercial activity—not conquest—is the most important source of power and wealth for liberal democracies. Since war disrupts industry and trade, conflict is not only counterproductive from the perspective of the national interest, it is understood to be so. Where potential belligerents – all sides – realize they stand to gain little and lose much from war, war is less likely. As Tocqueville foresaw,

As the spread of equality, taking place in several countries at once, simultaneously impels their various inhabitants to follow manufactures and commerce, not only do their tastes become similar, but their interests are so mixed and entangled with one another, no nation can inflict evils on other nations without those evils falling back upon itself; and all nations ultimately regard war as a calamity almost as severe to the conqueror as the conquered.

Glory. Kant, similarly, observed that where rulers are responsible to the people, their outward ambition is curtailed. A fundamental insight of *Perpetual Peace* is this: for a dictator, “declaring a war is the easiest thing in the world to do”²³⁰ – and many have done so build monuments in history to themselves, or to distract the people from their

²³⁰ Kant, *Perpetual Peace*.

domestic grievances; in a democracy, on the contrary, where citizens can and do hold decision-makers responsible for their actions, it is much more difficult to take the country to war. Where rulers are responsible to the people, the pride and vanity of a single man cannot be translated into all-out war. Nor can wars easily be embarked upon to rally a people around the flag in order to distract them from their regime's failings. Where the people who bear the hardships of war (in terms of blood and treasure) get to decide more or less directly whether to prosecute one, and where a body of elected officials must endorse or frustrate any such declaration, states are much less likely to take up arms. This follows the very basic insight—shared by Kant, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and others—that the vast majority of men prefer stability and quiet to what cannot be had absent tremendous danger and risk: honor, glory, victories of historical importance. To diminish the influence of that small minority willing to sacrifice life's comforts, even life itself, for glory and victory, it suffices to tether their political ascent to the risk-averse majority.

Self-defense. And so we come to the last motivation to take up arms, which is of course not limited to repelling imminent invasion or retaliating once the enemy has struck, but extends to deterring it, and to protecting a people's way of life against threats immediate, gathering, and "existential." When liberal democracies go to war, it is to meet or preempt threats, not to gain resources, or territory, or to satisfy the honor of the ruler. What precisely security from external threat demands and justifies is, and always will be, the subject of debate and the matter for imperfect sciences. The debates are, by their nature, full of hypothetical propositions and counterfactuals: what if Chamberlain had

prevented Germany's rearmament?; what if Bill Clinton had pursued Osama Bin Laden more aggressively?; what if George H. W. Bush had marched on to Baghdad? It is a cruel irony, stemming from something so invincible as the forward arrow of time, that measures taken to deter or preempt future threats well in advance of their appearing obviously necessary, even (and especially) when successful, are more difficult to vindicate in the public mind—this, as a direct consequence of their success! The event that would clearly justify prevention is prevented, and therefore cannot serve to justify the means *precisely because they were successful*.

Preventive war and efforts to remake the world order are audacious foreign policy prescriptions, which can (often credibly) be justified in terms of self-defense—the requirement of stanching a threat while the costs and dangers associated with doing so are tolerable. The question that arises here is this: at what point is one further increment of security from potential future threat no longer worth expending the resources and power that would be required to achieve it?

The United States has often been accused of twiddling its thumbs in the face of real danger. In the context of America's late entry into World War II, Winston Churchill famously opined that “the American people can be counted on to do the right thing, after they have exhausted all the alternatives.” And yet, once roused, America has demonstrated a real willingness to interpret its security with zealous (some would say impudent) concern for the future. In the wake of both world wars as well as the attacks of September 11th, the U.S. sought to refashion the international system by transforming its

actors and/or its international institutions. Not long after World War II, George Kennan wondered (provocatively),

whether in this respect a democracy is not uncomfortably similar to one of those prehistoric monsters with a body as long as this room and a brain the size of a pin: he lies there in his comfortable primeval mud and pays little attention to his environment; he is slow to wrath—in fact you practically have to whack his tail off to make him aware that his interests are being disturbed; but, once he grasps this, he lays about him with such blind determination that he not only destroys his adversary but largely wrecks his native habitat. You wonder whether it would not have been wiser for him to have taken a little more interest in what was going on at an earlier date and to have seen whether he could not have prevented some of these situations from arising . . .²³¹

If it is in the nature of a liberal democracy to abstain from war for gain and glory, it is also characteristic that, once roused from a concern (real or imagine) for its own defense, its participation will often be tinged by grandiose aims. The same features that lead modern Western states to refrain from wars of choice—in particular, their commitment to protecting a stable and free environment within which individuals are free to live as they please—lead them to seek to build, out of the ashes of conflicts they could not avoid, a world order that will not, in the future, require renewed intervention.

The Bush Doctrine and Realism

Let there be no mistake. According to its exponents, the NSS articulates a realist foreign policy, but of a new variety. On the understanding of those most closely associated with the Bush Doctrine, removing a brutal dictator to disseminate democracy is a morally

²³¹ Quoted in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 388.

laudable use of American power; but it is justifiable as U.S. foreign policy only so far as it advances the national interest. Charles Krauthammer, one of the most persuasive supporters of the Bush Doctrine leading up to Iraq's invasion, refers to this as "democratic realism". Promoting democracy abroad requires expending resources and power. And so, to the question "Where to bring democracy? Where to nation-build?" a "single criterion" is proposed: "where it counts."²³² A democratic realist approves of committing blood and treasure to regime change where, and only where, doing so promises a predictable payoff in terms of national security.

It should, nonetheless, be noted here that traditional realists object vehemently to the aims of the NSS – they deny that the strategy is driven by a realist understanding – because they deny the logic of democratic peace theory. In fact, realism begins with the premise that every state, irrespective of internal regime, struggles with other states in a perpetual pursuit of power. For the realist, as a state's power increases, so do its ambitions and the scope of its interests; and likewise, as a state's power decreases, so simultaneously its ambitions and the requirements of its interests decrease. Jonathan Monten adds pointedly to our understanding of the realist position: "under conditions of anarchy, imbalanced power creates the possibility of aggressive behavior, regardless of the domestic character or benign intent of the leading state."²³³ Contra the Neo-Conservatives, then, other states will inevitably balance against the American hegemon

²³² Charles Krauthammer, "Democratic Realism," Remarks at the American Enterprise Institute's 2004 Irving Kristol Dinner, http://www.aei.org/files/2004/03/01/20040227_book755text.pdf. cf. Charles Krauthammer, "In Defense of Democratic Realism," *The National Interest*, Fall (2004).

²³³ Jonathan Monten, "The Roots of the Bush Doctrine," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Spring, 2005), pp.117.

because hegemonic powers—be they democratic or despotic—are never believed by other state actors to be benevolent.

As Fukuyama helpfully observes, “Realism can at times become relativistic or agnostic about regimes; realists by and large do not believe that liberal democracy is a potentially universal form of government or that the human values underlying it are necessarily superior to those underlying non-democratic societies.”²³⁴ For realists from Thucydides to Morgenthau, human beings are selfish and by nature power-seeking.²³⁵ Thus, states pursue power, which tends to engender conflict among them, however their politics are organized. Neorealists, led by Kenneth Waltz, came to the same conclusion by more scientific means. They emphasize the structural dynamic of the international system as determinative instead of the nature of man. The international system can be characterized as a state of anarchy. The lack of a set of rules enforced by an supranational authority with a monopoly on the means of violence means states will inevitably compete for power for the sake of security—tomorrow’s if not today’s—vis a vis other states in the same position. Conflict is not necessarily constant and ubiquitous, but the threat of it is. Man’s nature, and/or the system, makes competition inevitable and perpetual. For realists and neorealists, the form of government is more or less an irrelevant variable when it comes to predicting their behavior in the international system.

States, then, are like black boxes or billiard balls (on Waltz’s famous analogy): to predict their actions and reactions one needs only to understand their relative positions, their

²³⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *American at the Crossroads*, 37.

²³⁵ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 3-4.

weight, their velocity, etc.; what's inside is immaterial to their behavior within the system. In fact, the system is much more likely to determine states' behavior than the states are to influence the system's dynamic. States, therefore, cannot "appropriately adjust[] their strategies" in order to "be able to achieve their original ends" because the structure which determines the effects of states' actions is itself determined by the unintended effects of their actions; in effect, the structure changes by the efforts of the states within it to adjust to it, thus making attempts to adjust to the structure, or to adjust the structure itself, all but futile.²³⁶

Advocates of the Bush foreign policy can claim the mantle of realism only by rejecting two of realism's fundamental assumptions. And it was possible to reject them, they thought, not because they are theoretically flawed, but because a unique set of historical circumstances permitted a temporary suspension of realist logic.

First, they rejected the inevitability of anarchy. The end of the Cold War yielded what Charles Krauthammer called America's "unipolar moment" or "era." (It turned out, indeed, to be short.) Nonetheless, upon the sudden and unexpected expiration of the Soviet Union, this following Europe's self-destruction in the first half of the century, America was left with a preponderance of power on a scale unknown in human history. And yet America had no interest in building an Empire on the model of Rome, or Persia, nor even Spain or Britain.

²³⁶ Kenneth Waltz, *Anarchic Orders and Balances of Power*, sect. 3, np.

This simple empirical fact represents a challenge for the traditional realist understanding. First, while most realists from Thucydides onward believed that “the plain truth is that both past events and those at some future time, in accordance with human nature, will recur in similar or comparable ways,” advocates of the Bush foreign policy believe America’s ascent to hegemonic status had changed this uniquely.²³⁷ The American Empire—and it can only be called an empire upon partial redefinition of the term—marked an exception to the realist rule because America (and her motivations) are exceptional in fundamental respects. If realism’s pessimism is rooted in its unhappy assessment of human nature or the international system, the realist logic is suspended today because America has managed to transform, or at least contain, the operation of the selfish human passions when it comes to her foreign policy. As John Owen explained in explaining the “mechanism” that accounts for democratic peace theory, it is necessary to open the ‘black box’ of the state “to show how democratic structures translate liberal preference into policy even when statesmen are themselves illiberal” in order to understand why liberal democracies do behave according to traditional realist rules.²³⁸ The character of the American regime—most important, the ingrained respect for natural, universal, rights built into the nation’s DNA, and from this, the conviction that the legitimate government can only be derived from consent—differentiates the United States from every previous hegemonic power because it renders her uninterested in using her power to accumulate more power and rule over foreign peoples without their consent.

²³⁷ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*. Book 1, beginning. As Quoted by Jonathan Morten in “The Roots of the Bush Doctrine,” p.128.

²³⁸ John, M. Owen, “How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,” 90.

Blatantly imperialistic behavior is morally unconscionable and utterly illegitimate on the basis of the nation's guiding principles. To the extent those principles are graven into the hearts of the electorate, Americans' political morality determines limits beyond which the state's power-seeking behavior cannot—except in extraordinary times, in which its security or way of life is obviously at stake—extend beyond. Thus, the international system American bestrode like a Colossus took on an unusual character. Indeed, America has famously been called a “benevolent hegemon,” more likely to act as a custodian of a world order, in which the autonomy of status quo powers is sacrosanct, than to employ its power to extend its influence.²³⁹

One of the Neoconservatives' great services was to rehabilitate serious discussion of regime and its impact in policymaking circles. They half-agreed with constructivists, led by Alexander Wendt. Wendt argued that ideational factors can affect the systemic dynamic by transforming the behavior of states. Put another way, the character of a people and its governors has a profound impact on the manner in which a state conceives of its interests, and therefore, the manner in which it seeks to amass and project power.²⁴⁰ That Americans' most fundamental political convictions are utterly incompatible with the traditional motivations of an imperial power mean that an international system dominated by such a power will necessarily operate differently. And indeed, in the context of history it is simply astonishing that America today *buys* the oil necessary to power its military, to maintain what stability exists in Iraq, from Iraq (among others) at

²³⁹ cf. William Kristol and Robert Kagan, *Present Dangers*, (New York: Encounter, 2000).

²⁴⁰ Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of it,” *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring, 1992).

prevailing market rates. What other hegemonic empire would have returned the oil fields of Kuwait—liberated at high cost—to Kuwait? Where the realist model posits that states will seek to increase their power and influence—prompting others to balance against it—the United States aspires to be able to build a stable status quo. When America projects power, it is aimed generally at defending or solidifying a legitimate world order, one which operates according to standards of legitimacy compatible with the constitutional principles Americans hold to be sacred. In the most ambitious case: it has aimed to build a better order.

Following from this, the Bush foreign policy denied a second realist proposition, namely that the internal makeup of states is irrelevant to their behavior vis a vis other states. Much as America puts its hegemonic power to benign use because of its own internal composition, so do the organizing principles of other regimes render them more or less hostile in their relations with other states. Pushing the logic of a constructivist further than its authors had, neoconservatives argued that by affecting the internal composition of a state, one could affect the manner in which state actors conceive of their interests so as to benefit the U.S. (and every status quo power in the system). They assumed the relevant ideas, values and norms that restrain America's power seeking behavior would likewise, and more or less automatically, restrain other states' behavior if they were only given new political regimes. The end result was the ambitious project articulated by the Bush Doctrine: successful regime change in a few key states could affect the entire international system. Democratization (if it also liberalized the people) would contribute to this end in two ways: by transforming the way the people conceive of their interests,

and by ensuring that the peoples new and gentle *mores* are reflected in a state's behavior (by new participatory institutions).²⁴¹ To be sure, constructivists thought their logic was much better suited to explaining and supporting a liberal internationalist foreign policy than the neoconservative version of realism that united the assertive use of power (unilateral and preemptive as necessary) to the constructivist notion that "ideationally constructed identities" exert an important affect on the character of the international system.²⁴²

Furthermore, neoconservatives seem to have assumed the character of a state's political regimes affects the sort of citizens it produces: commercial democracies produce men and women disposed to respect the rights and dignity of others, who will be tolerant and aspire to peaceful relations with those around them; totalitarian regimes tolerant of, or even friendly to, fanatical religious ideologies tend more often to produce fanatics, intent to promulgate their beliefs, by force when necessary. It makes a difference, in other words, whether the political education of a state teaches that justice requires the toleration of other ways of life; or alternatively, that America is the Great Satan, full of

²⁴¹ John M. Owen suggests goes so far as to suggest that a "synthesis" of liberal and realist thinking is possible on the issue of democratic peace if one is willing to accept a key constructivist assumption. International anarchy does not, necessarily, lead to narrow power-seeking behavior among liberal democracies because their mutual commitment to liberal principles transforms their conceptions of their own interests. Thus construed, liberal democracies achieve their overriding interests without resorting to arms. One must add to Owen's analysis that the mutual *recognition* among liberal democracies that all liberal democracies are deeply committed to the same principles makes possible a higher than ordinary degree of trust among those regimes insofar as liberal democracies can, with confidence, predict and rely upon the (usually restrained) behavior of other liberal democracies. John, M. Owen, "How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace," 123.

²⁴² cf. Valerie Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 10.

infidels, and that God wants such states and peoples destroyed. As a result, supporters of the Bush foreign policy would deny that one can anticipate how a given state, as well as its citizens or subjects, will behave in the international sphere without considering the internal makeup of that state. To illustrate this point by way of the billiard ball model, it matters what the billiard balls are made of. Iron balls, magnetic balls, plaster balls, explosive balls—they interact differently with one another. Predicting their behavior is impossible without considering what’s inside.

These two insights led to the articulation of a strange new kind of realist foreign policy—the national interest remained primary, but by transforming the way states conceive of their interests, it was believed the power-seeking behavior of states can be moderated, and the system itself rendered less (militarily) competitive.²⁴³ So, too, policymakers believed that the transformation of key regimes might render them less likely to create terrorists. America’s unipolar moment represented an opportunity to affect this change precisely because ordinary realist logic did not hold. Properly deployed, it was believed America’s preponderance of power could render more durable this suspension of the classical realist logic. The United States had a unique opportunity to build a new international world order. The Bush Doctrine, thus, ranks among the most audacious foreign policies consciously articulated by a superpower in modern history.

Unlike the system-transforming aims of other modern imperial powers—the Soviet and Nazi visions, for example—the American vision as articulated by President Bush was also

²⁴³ As Robert Jervis observes, “although Bush and his colleagues are realists in the large role for force they see in international politics, they are classical liberals in their beliefs about what drives foreign policy.” Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era*, 82.

morally laudable. What had often been impossible during the Cold War due to the existence of a peer power locked in a zero-sum struggle for influence was no longer impossible: America's values and interests could be made to come together. Thus, an ambitious plan to refashion the international system in a way that would benefit every participant seemed to be plausible. Policymakers hoped that liberating Iraq, helping to build a liberal democracy in the heart of the Middle East, would constitute a step toward the transformation of a part of the world in which oppression and poverty are the norm, and from which the most urgent threat to America's security had emerged.

If they did not quite articulate their goal in the terms of I.R. theory, this is, indeed, how leading supporters of the war understood its promise. Charles Krauthammer called the strategy "enormous, ambitious, and arrogant." He was even willing to admit that the Bush Doctrine might fail. But since it was impossible to draw up the bridge, and retreat to an isolationist foreign policy in the wake of 9/11, Krauthammer became one of the most powerful apostles for an audacious system-transforming approach, even though he acknowledged it might not work. The Bush Doctrine, what he called democratic realism, "may be a bridge too far," he admitted. "Realists have been warning against the hubris of thinking we can transform an alien culture because of some postulated natural and universal human will to freedom. And they may yet be right."²⁴⁴ Robert Jervis is, therefore, correct, at least in a sense, when he notes that "under the Bush Doctrine the United States is not a status quo power."²⁴⁵ And yet, insofar as the Bush administration

²⁴⁴ Charles Krauthammer, "Democratic Realism."

²⁴⁵ Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era*, 94.

sought to transform the international system in order to build a more stable peace—a more stable status quo—U.S. foreign policy under the Bush Doctrine is most assuredly not governed by the ordinary aims of a revisionist power on the classical realist understanding. As Jervis later intimates, the Bush doctrine rejected that status quo when it was revealed that a new threat, which it deemed intolerable could spring from it; thus, the U.S. dedicated its considerable power to “fashioning a new and better world.”²⁴⁶

Krauthammer endorsed democracy promotion in spite of the attendant uncertainties because he could not imagine another plausible solution to the terrorism problem that addressed *jihadists*’ motivations. A reactive realist posture toward the Middle East that ignored the internal goings on of strategically important states had helped to create the monster responsible for 9/11. In the age of Islamic terrorism and American unipolarity, an interests-first foreign policy seemed to demand seizing the opportunity presented by America’s unipolar moment and the opportunity Iraq seemed to represent. As he put it then,

Establishing civilized, decent, nonbelligerent, pro-Western polities in Afghanistan and Iraq and ultimately their key neighbors would, like the flipping of Germany and Japan in the 1940s, change the strategic balance in the fight against Arab-Islamic radicalism.²⁴⁷

John Agresto explains, similarly, that it was ultimately a “grander self-interest” that drove the undertaking in Iraq.

Yes, if there were weapons of mass destruction, they would need to be removed; yes, if there were Al-Qaeda links, they would need to be broken. A grander self-interest was at work in all this, but a self-interest

²⁴⁶ Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era*, 99.

²⁴⁷ Charles Krauthammer, “Democratic Realism.”

nonetheless: The coming of freedom and democracy and prosperity and stability to Iraq would be a world-changing event, an event of inestimable value to us and the free world...

America's real interest... was in changing the very character of the Middle East.²⁴⁸

Is the Bush Doctrine Really So New?

If the Bush Doctrine can be distinguished from previous U.S. foreign policies for the grandiosity of its aims, and the loftiness of the rhetoric deployed to advance it publicly, the ideas at its core are not new. In fact, to charge that neoconservatives are solely responsible for the notion that spreading democracy is both noble and beneficial from the perspective of the U.S. national interest is simply false, either the product of gross historical ignorance or blatant disingenuousness. The United States has a long history of promoting regime change and democracy abroad, in a variety of ways from a variety of motivations. Debates surrounding the desirability of such undertakings are nothing new. As Robert Kagan details in an important 2008 *World Affairs* piece, even though the war in Iraq will probably always be linked to the term 'neoconservative,' it is as much a product of a thread that runs from the American Founders to the Clintons and beyond, through heroes such as Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt.

He reminds us that Alexander Hamilton, "even in the 1770s, looked forward to the day when America would be powerful enough to assist peoples in the 'gloomy regions of

²⁴⁸ John Agresto, *Mugged by Reality* (New York: Encounter, 2007), 10.

despotism’ to rise up against the ‘tyrants’ that oppressed them.”²⁴⁹ It was the great American Republican, Thomas Jefferson—a Republican who really stood for limited national authority!—who famously devoted the last letter he would pen to the universality of the ideals underlying America’s Declaration of Independence. Jefferson may not have approved of foreign adventures dedicated to spreading it—not, in any case, in the aftermath of the French Revolution—but he poetically reminds us of the special significance of America’s Founding creed with words we wrote on the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration:

May it be to the world, what I believe it will be, (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all,) the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bund themselves, and so assume the blessings and security of self-government.²⁵⁰

Abraham Lincoln’s commitment to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence led to a rebirth of freedom, a second American founding possible only in the aftermath of a bloody civil war. He understood that the republic could not stand divided against itself, and argued that if slavery was not on a sure road to eventual extinction, it would have to be extinguished by the sword, even at terrible cost. Lincoln believed free government, in America *and beyond* her borders, depended on it. The Civil War completed America’s founding. It is the valiant and ultimately successful defense of the ideals to which the U.S. Constitution is devoted that redeems the blood and sacrifice of so many valiant men.

²⁴⁹ Robert Kagan, “Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, c. 1776,” *World Affairs*, Spring 2008. <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/neocon-nation-neoconservatism-c-1776>.

²⁵⁰ Thomas Jefferson, Merrill Peterson, ed., *Writings* (New York, The Library of America, 1984), 1517.

On the eve of World War One, Theodore Roosevelt conceived of America as “the just man armed,” a nation charged with the noble task of defending freedom against autocracy. Once again, America was fighting in the service of its guiding principles: “As our fathers fought with slavery and crushed it, in order that it not seize and crush them... so we are called on to fight new forces...” the President announced.²⁵¹ When Woodrow Wilson appeared before a joint session of Congress to seek a Declaration of War against Germany on 2 April, 1917, he explained America’s motivations in inspired terms:

The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.²⁵²

World War II and the Cold War, similarly, were framed by American leaders as wars fought not simply for the sake of tangible U.S. interests, but from a broader commitment to freedom and democracy as well. The totalitarian empires of the twentieth century represented a clear threat to the free world, and the free world met that threat by confidently asserting the value of its way of life. To be sure, means were, at times, utilized that were not consistent with the American character and the ideals it was fighting ultimately to preserve. At the same time, however, the grand system-transforming ambitions of Nazi Germany and the Communist Soviet Regime revealed very clearly the important relationship between U.S. security and the endurance and proliferation of

²⁵¹ Robert Kagan, “Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, c. 1776.”

²⁵² President Woodrow Wilson, “Remarks to the Sixty-Fifth Congress,” 1 Session, Senate Document No. 5.

constitutional democracies abroad. The Marshall Plan is considered such a foreign policy success today because the rapid rebuilding of Europe's economies, decimated by the war, helped to ensure that the prevailing instability was not translated into Communist gains. U.S. security required containing Soviet Communism; containing Soviet Communism, in turn, required shoring up regimes that shared America's liberal democratic values (and so conceived of their interests in similar terms) on the borders of that expanding Empire.

If the Cold War was dominated by a realist approach to international relations in which the exigencies of an existential conflict sometimes demanded compromising liberal-democratic principles, it must be remembered that they were compromised for the sake of the regime's ultimate survival. Jimmy Carter's inaugural address seemed to portend an important shift in American foreign policy—away from the interest-based posture that demanded supporting friendly strongmen, toward the promotion of freedom and American ideals abroad. Jimmy Carter spoke eloquently about freedom and the nation's ideals.

The passion for freedom is on the rise. Tapping this new spirit, there can be no nobler nor more ambitious task for America to undertake on this day of a new beginning than to help shape a just and peaceful world that is truly humane.

We are a strong nation, and we will maintain strength so sufficient that it need not be proven in combat—a quiet strength based not merely on the size of an arsenal, but on the nobility of ideas.

We will be ever vigilant and never vulnerable, and we will fight our wars against poverty, ignorance, and injustice—for those are the enemies against which our forces can be honorably marshaled.

We are a purely idealistic Nation, but let no one confuse our idealism with weakness.

Because we are free we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom elsewhere. Our moral sense dictates a clear-cut preference for these societies which share with us an abiding respect for individual human rights. We do not seek to intimidate, but it is clear that a world which others can dominate with impunity would be inhospitable to decency and a threat to the well-being of all people.²⁵³

President Carter was, of course, mugged by the reality of the Communist threat when Soviet tanks rolled into Afghanistan in 1979. It is indeed a revealing irony that the Carter Doctrine—an eminently realist appraisal of the strategic importance of the Middle East to U.S. interests—is associated with (arguably) the most liberal President of the twentieth century, a man who today takes the lead making appeasing overtures to Hamas. It was the same Jimmy Carter who, in cooperation with Pakistan’s Islamist-dominated Inter-Services Intelligence agency (the ISI), began arming the Afghan *mujahedeen* as a proxy—a very effective proxy as it turned out—in order to help the Afghans resist the Soviet incursion, a move was no doubt but a preface to the possible invasion of Iran and the oil-rich Gulf states. In a testament to the truism that war begets bizarre and unholy alliances, the movement was funded and armed by America (support expanded dramatically under Ronald Reagan), even as it drew *jihadi* Muslims from across the Middle East and North Africa to Afghanistan and into the struggle against an infidel imperial power.

A decade later, the Soviet Union was defeated but out of the ashes of the brutal infighting that beset the *mujahedeen* there emerged a new movement—the Taliban. (The undeniable contribution of Islamists who, in their minds were fighting a Holy War, to the defeat and

²⁵³ President James Carter, “Inaugural Address,” 20 January, 1977.
<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/speeches/inaugadd.phtml>

expiration of the Soviet superpower, meanwhile, has served as a potent propaganda instrument for Islamists bent on recruiting young Muslims to join the jihad against the world's remaining non-Islamic superpower, the United States.) The conclusion to draw from this unfortunate and unanticipated consequence of American intervention is not that America is responsible for creating the monstrous regime that harbored Al-Qaeda pre-9/11. Rather, it demonstrates clearly that the relationship between the requirements of defending our way of life and the regime dedicated to it on the one hand, and the ideals our regime exists to protect on the other, are related in complicated ways, especially when the country's interests are threatened.

If Ronald Reagan met the Soviet threat by emphasizing and increasing America's military might, he was, at the same time, a powerful apostle for democracy and liberty. For Reagan, a more assertive posture vis a vis the Soviet Union was justified by the fact it was an evil and oppressive tyranny. A moral commitment to freedom, and the recognition that democracy would be best preserved in an expanding free world, underlay his foreign policy. His rhetoric reflected as much. If calling the Soviet Union an "evil Empire" and challenging Gorbachev to "tear down this wall" did not resonate particularly well among ivory tower intellectuals in America, it was positively inspirational in Eastern Europe.²⁵⁴ An ambitious arms build up was the cost of ensuring the weapons would never be used. And the pressures of competing in an arms race with a free economy ultimately led Gorbachev to open the Soviet economy. The result: the end of

²⁵⁴ cf. Francis Fukuyama, *America at a Crossroads*, 51.

the Cold War and the emergence of a block of constitutional regimes that have been called ‘new Europe.’

Nor did the disintegration of the Soviet Union end America’s interventions for the sake of democratic regime change in foreign countries. George H. W. Bush intervened in Panama and Kuwait in the name of an improved “New World Order.” Bill Clinton authorized the deployment of U.S. military force in Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo (the latter without U.N. authorization) on humanitarian grounds. In fact, not counting the great wars of the twentieth century, by one count, the U.S. overthrew fourteen governments with the intention of installing new governments between 1893 and 2003.²⁵⁵

Kagan concludes that this “belief in the possibility of global transformation, this ‘messianic’ impulse, far from being aberrant, is a dominant strain in the American character.”²⁵⁶ Moreover, he argues that “in every generation... the expansive, moralistic, hubristic American approach has rolled over its critics, sometimes into victory and success, sometimes into disappointment and calamity.”²⁵⁷ Kagan does not mean this as a damning criticism of the history of U.S. foreign policy. Rather, he traces the enduring power of this “messianic” impulse to an important feature of American exceptionalism. An important “source” of this long-standing commitment to spreading democracy, he argues, “is the American commitment to universal principles embedded in the nation’s

²⁵⁵ Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow* (New York: Times Books, 2006), 1.

²⁵⁶ Robert Kagan, “Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, c. 1776.”

²⁵⁷ Robert Kagan, “Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, c. 1776.”

founding documents, and the belief that these principles are not debatable but are...
written in the stars by the hand of God...”²⁵⁸

One can even go further than Kagan. The ideas integral to a functioning liberal democracy—that all men are created equal, that individuals and minorities have rights no government can legitimately encroach upon, that legitimate government can only be derived from consent, and that impartial laws ought to apply equally and durably to every member of the society—are the very same ideas that, once genuinely internalized, implore those committed to them to live in peace with other nations so disposed, and to spread them where the ideas do not prevail. An awareness that our form of government and the freedoms it makes possible is the most just (certainly the least imperfect) political arrangement that has ever existed is inseparable from the recognition that it is a noble thing to spread it, at least where doing so is possible.

This is not to say, however, that the nobility and worthiness of our regime justifies every foreign intervention in the name of its vaunted principles. Far from it. Prudential calculation—aimed at determining whether the end is attainable at a cost that is justifiable—must be undertaken seriously. Similarly, policymakers must not allow themselves to become so carried away by their noble eagerness to deploy U.S. power in a morally responsible way as to lose sight of balance of power considerations.

In a seminal article entitled “The Mainsprings of U.S. Foreign Policy” (1950), Hans Morgenthau foresaw and warned against precisely this danger. He argued that the rough

²⁵⁸ Robert Kagan, “Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, c. 1776.”

identity of America's security interests and the requirements of a democratic morality from the time of the Founding through World War II was a fortuitous accident of history. Support for constitutional democracies abroad has, very often, helped to maintain a balance of power in Europe, what was arguably the first requirement of U.S. security until the end of WWII. In his estimation, however, only the strategic importance of maintaining that balance—*not* the moral argument in favor of promoting *decent* government—can demand and legitimate the expenditure of U.S. blood and treasure abroad. Furthermore, he discerned a worrying trend in the foreign policy rhetoric of American policymakers mid century: the subordination of American interests to moral considerations. Morgenthau argues that devoting great attention to morality in international relations is positively dangerous. Very likely, he would point to America's post-Cold War foreign interventions (with the likely exception of Kuwait in 1990) as examples of the danger. He may well be correct that to the extent that maintaining power balances in regions of vital strategic interest is no longer the fixed guiding star according to which U.S. foreign policy is organized, it is as a direct result of its subordination to moral considerations. To wit, there is little evidence that policymakers gave sufficient consideration to the likely effect of intervention in Iraq on the region's balance of power. Iran—arguably a greater threat to American interests than Iraq, even in 2003—has been the chief beneficiary of the removal of its historical rival in the region. There is little evidence policymakers asked themselves how Iranian actors would conceive of and pursue Iran's interests while a world superpower sought to transform the political regime of two of its neighbors.

One purpose of this dissertation is to, with the benefit of hindsight, highlight important elements of the foreign policy calculation that were not sufficiently appreciated when the Bush administration decided to intervene in Iraq with the aim of establishing a constitutional democracy there. Grave errors were made because the requirements of liberal democracy were insufficiently appreciated, and the impediments present today in parts of the Islamic world, underestimated. It is, nonetheless, appropriate to begin by acknowledging that it is in precisely those individuals who most appreciate our tremendous good fortune, in whom the awareness that we are uniquely privileged to live under conditions of unprecedented freedom, prosperity, and stability is most pronounced, that the good and noble impulse to help disseminate the blessings of liberty exerts the strongest influence.

Kagan ends his essay with a remarkable statement it would be difficult to dispute:

[T]he expansive, idealistic, and at times militaristic American approach to foreign policy has produced some accomplishments of world historical importance—the defeat of Nazism, Japanese imperialism, and Soviet Communism—as well as some notable failures and disappointments. But it was not as if the successes were the product of a good America and the failures the product of a bad America. They were all the product of the same America. The achievements, as well as the failures, derived not from innocence or purity of motive, and not because Americans abided by an imagined ideal of conduct in the world, but from the very qualities that often make Americans queasy: their willingness to accumulate and use power, their ambition and sense of honor, their spiritedness in defense of both interests and principles, their dissatisfaction with the status quo and belief in the possibility of change. Are we really interested in abandoning this course?²⁵⁹

If the Bush Doctrine has failed, it is not necessarily because of an error of grand strategy or guiding impulse, but rather, because the prudential calculation was off. For

²⁵⁹ Robert Kagan, “Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, c. 1776.”

misunderstanding the nature of the task, America tried to achieve too much while misapplying the resources it had at its disposal. It is worth repeating that President Bush is not the first U.S. president to have emphasized democracy-promotion as an integral element of this nation's foreign policy. *Most have.* The Middle East had, until 2001, been exempt from such efforts, subjected to a more brutal interest-based calculus. Far from being the first president to make democratization an integral element of his foreign policy, President Bush was merely the first U.S. President to apply a democratization strategy aggressively in the Middle East.²⁶⁰ As Condoleezza Rice noted in an important speech delivered in Cairo on 20 June, 2005, “for 60 years, the United States pursued stability at the expense of democracy in the Middle East — and we achieved neither.”²⁶¹ As she explains, shifting U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East toward a greater emphasis on liberty and democracy was, in effect, to bring to America's approach to Islamic world into line with America's broader foreign policy tradition. Secretary Rice expressed this point in *Foreign Affairs* near the end of the administration's tenure:

our approach is, in reality, an extension of traditional tenets — incorporating human rights and the promotion of democratic development into a policy meant to further our national interest. What is exceptional is that the Middle East was treated as an exception for so many decades. U.S. policy there focused almost exclusively on stability... After September 11, it became increasingly clear that this old bargain had produced false stability.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ cf., Joshua Muravchik, “The Abandonment of Democracy,” *Commentary*, July/August 2009. <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/the-abandonment-of-democracy/>

²⁶¹ Condoleezza Rice, “Remarks in Cairo at American University,” 20 June, 2005. <http://www.arabist.net/blog/2005/6/20/condoleezza-rices-remarks-from-her-cairo-speech-at-auc.html>

²⁶² Condoleezza Rice, “Rethinking the National Interest”, *Foreign Affairs*, 5.

It is impossible to deny that democratization in the Middle East (along liberal-constitutional lines) is desirable: success would be good for those living under the transformed regimes, and good for the United States. In Iraq, however, the endeavor proved more ambitious in scope and more difficult to implement than virtually anybody anticipated. The questions that remains—the question to which this project is devoted—is why? Why did the Bush administration fail to achieve its grand strategy in Iraq, and what can be learned about democratization as foreign policy, especially in the Middle East, going forward?

CHAPTER II

CLUMSY, SLAPDASH, AND DUMB

Does the apparent failure of the U.S. military to build a functioning democracy in Iraq discredit the Bush foreign policy? Answering this question requires that we address an important prior question: were the difficulties encountered in Iraq inevitable, therefore constituting a repudiation of the strategy? Or were those difficulties the product of a failure to implement a strategy that may yet be sound? Answering this question requires that we dwell in some detail on the mistakes they were made, as well as the reasons they were made. To put the question another way: was the brutal insurgency no one predicted in Iraq, and which in many minds discredits the Bush Doctrine, inevitable? Or was it the avoidable consequence of terrible failures of implementation? Either way, what does the insurgency tell us about the possibility of establishing a constitutional democracy in Iraq and the Middle East? These questions are taken up in the next two chapters.

That war preparations were inadequate to the ambitious aims laid out by President Bush is unanimously accepted. In aftermath of the initial, and wildly successful, shock and awe campaign that toppled the Ba'athist regime in three weeks in the Spring of 2003, every month seemed to bring worse news until it seemed the country might only be saved by partitioning its warring factions into separate states. The Defense Department is usually singled out for special criticism; it was the department in charge of planning the war, including Iraq's reconstruction. A number of very good studies detailing the early operational failures that made way for the insurgency come to precisely this conclusion.

The general charge is that the U.S.-led Coalition did not deploy its resources in a responsible or intelligent manner given its own war aims and in light of the circumstances under which it was operating. The means deployed did not match the aims of the war. Virtually every commentator agrees that the insurgency could have been avoided, that Iraq came to the brink of civil war—to some descended into civil war—because of planning and implementation failures on a scale rarely seen.

According to Larry Diamond in *Squandered Victory*, a series of mistakes and miscalculations in post-war Iraq, mistakes and miscalculations constituting “negligence on a monumental scale,” effectively led to the “squandering of a decisive, potentially historic military victory.”²⁶³ For Gordon and Trainor in *Cobra II*, “the bitter insurgency American and British forces confront today was not preordained,” but rather, the product of “five grievous errors” committed by “President Bush and his team.”²⁶⁴ They argue pointedly that “there is a direct link between the way the Iraq War was planned and the bitter insurgency the American-led coalition subsequently confronted.”²⁶⁵ Peter Galbraith has been a consistent critic of the way the Iraq war has been prosecuted; he argues that “The Bush Administration’s grand ambitions for Iraq were undone by arrogance, ignorance, and political cowardice,” that a series of bad assumptions led to operational and tactical errors that have made it much more difficult to accomplish American objectives in the country.²⁶⁶ In perhaps the most impressive account of the war in print, *The Occupation of*

²⁶³ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory* (New York: Owl Books, 2005), 278, 292.

²⁶⁴ Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 497.

²⁶⁵ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 498.

²⁶⁶ Peter Galbraith, *The End of Iraq*, 9.

Iraq, Ali A. Allawi is palpably at a loss when it comes to encapsulating for the book's prologue the "astonishing" range and number of errors committed: "The invasion and occupation of Iraq comprised an index of errors of commission and omission. I would be difficult to catalogue them all. There were just too many..."²⁶⁷ Disparate and numerous though the mistakes he elucidates are, he attributes them all to one cause: "in official Washington, the ignorance of what was going on inside Iraq before the war was monumental." George Packer, in *The Assassin's Gate* is, perhaps, the one of the harshest critics of all:

I came to believe those in positions of highest responsibility for Iraq showed a carelessness about human life that amounted to criminal negligence. Swaddled in abstract ideas, convinced of their own righteousness, incapable of self-criticism, indifferent to accountability, they turned a difficult undertaking into a needlessly deadly one... The Iraq War was always winnable; it still is. For this very reason, the recklessness of its authors is all the harder to forgive.²⁶⁸

Most serious treatments of the Iraq war contend that the aim was noble, and the war necessary (or at the very least well-intentioned). They tend to agree that the war's objective could have been achieved at reasonable cost, but that inexcusable operational and tactical mistakes have rendered the establishment of a moderate constitutional regime more difficult than it ought to have been. Underlying most of these criticisms is a confidence that better planning, and a better understanding of the task at hand could have made a world of difference, that a moderate constitutional democracy could have been built, and a brutal internecine war avoided. No doubt, Iraq could have been prevented from coming to the brink of civil war. It is not clear, however, that operational

²⁶⁷ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 8.

²⁶⁸ George Packer, *The Assassin's Gate*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005), 448.

mistakes alone, and the space these provided for the brutal insurgency, account entirely for the fact Iraq has proven resistant to democracy and moderate government.

John Agresto's criticism in *Mugged by Reality* is in a sense the most trenchant because the author goes beyond the long and tragic catalogue of errors of implementation most authors identify as being determinative. It is not simply that the Coalition's many operational and planning mistakes provided opportunity and fuel for a destabilizing insurgency; Agresto argues that American policymakers lacked an adequate understanding of what the task the Bush administration had committed itself to in a much more fundamental sense. The U.S. had no idea what building a liberal democracy in the part of the world most resistant to it would require because the principals' understanding of liberal democracy was deeply inadequate. Agresto, a scholar with an unusually impressive understanding of the founding tenets of the American regime to begin with, admits that his time in Iraq (he was a CPA minister) further reinforced his appreciation for the importance of the ideological underpinnings of the West's liberal democracy. He argues, furthermore, that building a functioning constitutional regime along Western lines would have required more than a better organized sweeping away of what remained of the old regime in favor of building new institutions and writing a new constitution in Iraq. It would have required much more attention to public *mores* and social practices, to education and the political impact of religion, in short to the effective springs that give motion and character to participatory institutions in any country. He suggests that the policymakers in charge of the Iraq effort had no stomach for the means and methods successful democratic reform would have required precisely because they could not

envision that some reform of the subject matter, the people and their ideas, would have been prerequisite to successful political reform. Similarly, he argues that building democratic institutions cannot be a democratic process where the people have not been deeply touched by liberal ideals. As he summarizes, “We are in danger of losing all we hoped to accomplish in Iraq because we haven’t a clue as to how to be an effective occupying power...”²⁶⁹

Implied by that statement is the recognition that building a functioning constitutional regime in Iraq would have required patience beyond anything policymakers fathomed, and means they refused to consider. As we will see, high-ranking officials approached Iraq beholden to the pleasant and easy assumption that, in Agresto’s words, “all that would be needed to have liberty and democracy succeed in that sad nation was to take the lid off.”²⁷⁰ One of the things Iraq has reminded Westerners is that democratic politics is more than institutions and elections. Culture, that is civilization-level non-material factors, *is* important. Agresto is surely right when he argues that it is too much to say “culture is destiny,” as a few of critics are professing after ten long years in Afghanistan and Iraq. But the bigger mistake is the one planners made: to deny that civilization-level influences are important. Precisely because Agresto well appreciates the relationship between democratic institutions and liberal beliefs in the West, his position on Iraq is nuanced; he argues that the fundamental mistake in America’s approach to Iraq stemmed from “our inability to understand and promote those parts and aspects of the culture that

²⁶⁹ John Agresto, *Mugged By Reality* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007) xiv.

²⁷⁰ John Agresto, *Mugged By Reality*, 8.

were modern, democratic, and liberal and deflate those parts that were fanatical, repressive, and antagonistic.”²⁷¹

Critics who focus exclusively on the operational errors and planning failures are absolutely correct that a parade of terrible and inexcusable mistakes made the situation in Iraq much worse than it would otherwise have been. But Agresto’s more radical criticism—that we underestimated Iraq’s preparedness for modern and moderate government for failing to appreciate liberal democracy’s requisites and its impediments—is the more perceptive criticism. Near the end of his book he underlines what surprised him most about his time in Iraq as an American member of the initial transition government:

I guess what I found most amazing about the liberation, the occupation, and the repeated desire to help Iraq become ‘democratic’ as stated by Americans at all levels—from us in the CPA [Coalition Provisional Authority] all the way to the White House—was how little Americans actually knew about democracy...

What most hit me behind the head was America’s ignorance of what America had accomplished and what made *America* great.²⁷²

The second half of this dissertation is devoted, on the one hand, to a systemic explanation of the underappreciated and exemplary social character required to make democracy “work” as it does on the Western world. What, precisely, does Agresto mean by a Christianity “tamed by the Enlightenment” or the “‘conversion’ of Christianity from its theocratic and absolutist tendencies”; and how did this lay the ground for tolerant

²⁷¹ John Agresto, *Mugged By Reality*, xiv.

²⁷² John Agresto, *Mugged By Reality*, 106-107.

liberalism.²⁷³ On the other hand, Part 2 investigates efforts by Islam's most widely read twentieth century thinkers to accomplish precisely the opposite in the Islamic world, that is, to radicalize or purify Islamic practice. How have these ideas helped erect barriers to liberal democracy in the Arab-Islamic world? This is the "eight-hundred-pound gorilla in the room" Agresto refers to in his account, one "we in the Judeo-Christian West have scant notion how to confront."²⁷⁴ While very insightful comments in this vein can be found in Agresto's work among a few others, to date, no examination of what scholars have termed the "Islamic Resurgence" and its dominant system of beliefs exists, certainly not one that investigates its effects from the perspective of liberal democracy. The political nature of the Islamic Resurgence, and the extent to which it limits political possibilities in the Arab world is also taken up in Part 2.

Before we consider those questions, however, it is important to consider two prior questions: first, the character of the operational failure that allowed the insurgency to spiral into what can arguably be considered a civil war. In short, the Bush administration did not muster a war effort calculated to attain the end game it announced; this chapter tells that story. Second, it is worth considering the manner in which the rights and institutions of democracy were put to illiberal use in Iraq by Iraqis fuelled by passions and hatreds hardly recognizable to Western observers. The same sectarian zeal and fanaticism that manifested violently after Saddam Hussein's regime was decapitated

²⁷³ John Agresto, *Mugged By Reality*, 10, 16.

²⁷⁴ John Agresto, *Mugged By Reality*, 183.

continues to cause political paralysis and governmental dysfunction today. Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to these questions.

Interagency Disputes and Planning Failures

From the beginning, there was little coordination among the government's departments and agencies that would be involved in the war. The CIA and State Department were opposed to comprehensive regime change in Iraq from the beginning as we have seen, and would end up frustrating the Defense Department's efforts to prepare a government of externals to take over after the invasion itself. Worse than this, neither the civilian nor (especially) the military leadership at the Pentagon ever really *internalized* the democratization strategy settled upon by the President. They did not internalize the goal, in the first place, because they did not share it. As a result, the scope of the planning for post-conflict operations and reconstruction never quite matched the scope of the objective.

Precisely to avoid jurisdictional conflicts between State Department and Defense Department officials, it was decided a few months before the March 2003 invasion that the Pentagon would be in charge of the entire affair. The key recommendation at an October 15th National Security Council meeting was to put a single cabinet official, the Secretary of Defense, in charge of the entire military mission, from major combat operations to reconstruction: pointedly, even Feith admits that Donald Rumsfeld and his department would bear responsibility “for the full range of reconstruction tasks—political,

economic, and security.”²⁷⁵ National Security Presidential Directive 24 formalized DOD command primacy, and established a clear command structure. It represented a concerted attempt to minimize the practical consequences of inter-agency disagreements, to ease the transition from combat operations to reconstruction (where the State Department could conceivably have taken the lead), and to leave one agency responsible for Iraq’s success (or failure).

This was prescribed largely to remedy problems encountered in Bosnia and early in the Afghan campaign. In both countries, dividing reconstruction responsibilities by task among agencies (and in the latter case, among countries as well) had confused the process. Coordination proved next to impossible and related tasks—undertaken by diverse actors—were constantly accomplished according incommensurate standards and specifications. Having settled on unity of command in principle, the Defense Department was the natural choice of agency in which to lodge that authority. It is where civilian and military chains of command come together (in the Secretary of Defense). Moreover, as Paul Bremer would later observe, the successful reconstruction and democratization of Germany and Japan had been directed by a single department after WWII when DOD was still known as the “War Department.”²⁷⁶

According to Feith, the Secretary of State agreed that all reconstruction authority and responsibility be located in one department, and even that the Department of Defense was the obvious place to locate that authority. Colin Powell confirms this in a 2008

²⁷⁵ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 315-16.

²⁷⁶ L. Paul Bremer, Interview with PBS Frontline, 9 October, 2003.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/truth/interviews/bremer.html>

interview with the Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction:

“State does not have the personnel, the capacity, or the size to deal with an immediate post-war situation in a foreign country that’s eight thousand miles away from here.”²⁷⁷

While it is certainly true that State commands no divisions, the vast majority of the non-military personnel that could have made the biggest contribution—Arabists, officials with reconstruction experience, and those post-conflict expertise—were part of the State Department, resources that were simply not employed in the aftermath of the invasion. Powell supported giving the Department of Defense the lead in Iraq reconstruction planning, but added that the effort “would have been better served if [the DOD] had asked for more help from outside people.”²⁷⁸ Moreover, if Rumsfeld and Powell ultimately agreed on the “who” and the “why” when it came to the unity of command decision, Lt. Gen. George Casey emphasizes that the decision was not taken easily. In his interview with the Contemporary Operations Study Team, he explained that achieving this consensus came at a heavy cost: “we lost, in my view, two months while we fought over who was going to be in charge.”²⁷⁹

Unity of command makes a good deal of sense if those in command have the resources and capacity to accomplish the mission. But there was a flipside. Suddenly the Department of Defense was in charge of tasks it had little recent experience undertaking. The State Department and its Agency for International Development had accumulated

²⁷⁷ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 2010, <http://www.sigir.mil/publications/lessonsLearned.html>, 49.

²⁷⁸ Donald Wright and Tomithy Reese with the Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II: Transition to a New Campaign* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 71.

²⁷⁹ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 12.

significant expertise through their humanitarian relief and nation building efforts in Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo in the decades leading up to Saddam Hussein's overthrow. It was decided that a brand new office at Defense would be chartered to undertake these tasks less than three months before it would be deployed halfway around the world rebuilding and reconstituting a regime. It is hardly surprising that the small office underestimated the on-the-ground requirements of accomplishing their task in a fragile and war-torn country. David Phillips usefully points out that "one of the cardinal rules in post-conflict peace building is to apply lessons learned from comparable operations." As he goes on to explain, in this case "the Pentagon decided to erase the U.S. government's institutional memory and go it alone."²⁸⁰ The unity of command decision was an audacious one. The consequences of the lack of expertise and nation-building experience at DOD would, unfortunately, prove more consequential than the benefits of a unified command.

In the meantime, the establishment and staffing of an agency under DOD auspices specifically tasked with planning post-combat operations was delayed for months, until war was clearly imminent, for diplomatic and public relations reasons. There was a fear that the *New York Times* or some other paper would have cried "scandal!" had they discovered the Pentagon was actively planning the reconstruction of a country before war to unseat its ruler had become inevitable. Or rather, they would have broadcast the decision to plan diligently and in advance for post-conflict Iraq as a damning indicator that war was, at this point, a settled fact. The President had not yet come to any such

²⁸⁰ David Phillips, *Losing Iraq* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 126.

determination, a fact evidenced by his concern to avoid appearing as though he had. In this case, explicit concern for appearances trumped prudential calculation and careful logistical planning. Rumsfeld ordered the establishment of what would eventually become ORHA in October 2002, five months before the war began, only to retract the order a few days later on the President's direct order.²⁸¹ Perversely, a concern for the optics, for the appearance of propriety, once again hampered the Pentagon's ability to meet Iraq's exigencies—the terrible requirements of war and war planning—responsibly and effectively. ORHA, the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, was finally re-chartered on 20 January, 2003, only 61 days before the task of rebuilding a devastated country would commence in practice.

The organization initially numbered fewer than two hundred staff. It was created to *advise* Tommy Franks on the aspects of reconstruction that went beyond security. Headed by Jay Garner, a retired Lieutenant General with humanitarian experience in Iraq dating to the 1991 Gulf War, ORHA recruited individuals from the military and DOD, the private sector, the academy, out of retirement, and a few people from State, for their expertise on issues germane to the establishment of a new regime: security, resource management, infrastructure, education, health, sports, urban planning, etc.

Garner's team spent the end of January and the month February reviewing studies of post-Saddam Iraq prepared by various government agencies. As army historians summarize in an under examined 720-page study of the first 18 months of the occupation, *On Point II: Transition to the New Campaign* (released in June, 2008), ORHA

²⁸¹ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 12.

concluded that “the four most likely crises to occur in Iraq after the toppling of the Baathist regime [were] oil field fires, large numbers of refugees, food shortages, and the outbreak of epidemics.”²⁸² As a result, the office was organized around the three dominant concerns war planners thought likely to afflict Iraq post-war: providing humanitarian relief, establishing a new civil administration, and initiating reconstruction. Needless to say, these assumptions were wildly off the mark. Garner’s ORHA expected “to hand off its mission to a new diplomatic entity or embassy in as little as a few months.”²⁸³ In sum, ORHA was a tiny organization assembled hastily mainly of academics and analysts; it commanded no divisions, had virtually zero concrete capabilities of its own, and had no existing relationship with civilian contractors or the military upon whom it would be reliant for virtually everything; the problems and contingencies it expected to encounter on the ground, lastly, and for which it devoted the little time and inadequate resources it had at its disposal, were worlds away from those that would convulse Iraq for years.²⁸⁴

Moreover, Garner had expected the new office would be “operationalizing” plans that had been developed through a long interagency planning process. He was shocked to find that no detailed point-by-point campaign plan for reconstruction existed as the U.S. transitioned to Phase IV (Reconstruction) of the war. Nor could Garner get immediately to work when he arrived: a portion of the short time they had to plan Iraq’s

²⁸² Donald Wright and Tomithy Reese with the Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II: Transition to a New Campaign*, 71.

²⁸³ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 489.

²⁸⁴ cf. Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 151-152.

reconstruction was instead spent trying to staff the organization, even setting up the organization's offices.²⁸⁵

Another immediate problem: Garner was not able or permitted to hire the most competent people in government who were willing to contribute to Iraq's reconstruction. Secretary Rumsfeld quashed 32 of Garner's requests because they came from the State Department. As Timothy Carney, a former Ambassador to Sudan who joined ORHA for a short time on the recommendation of Paul Wolfowitz, has noted, the State Department's Arabists (though a lack of Arab-speaking personnel was an enduring problem) "were not welcome because they did not think Iraq could be democratic."²⁸⁶ Not even Feith is able to provide Rumsfeld much cover on this charge. On his account, Garner presented a list of prospective Senior Ministry Advisors for ORHA (the men who would fill its most senior positions) in late February 2003. Though he denies Rumsfeld rejected the nominations out of interagency malice, he admits Rumsfeld had a problem with the list primarily for the number of State Department and USAID personnel it included. Recall that the fundamental dispute between State and Defense was their differing assessment of how long it would take to establish a functioning government in post-Saddam Iraq, and how best to accomplish it. Rumsfeld rejected the list and demanded more options, something Feith took to indicate he wanted more of a "voice in selecting the key Senior Ministry Advisors."²⁸⁷ Colin Powell and high-ranking officials at State were incensed; Feith admits that "officials there took it as the grossest of insults that

²⁸⁵ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 52.

²⁸⁶ David Phillips, *Losing Iraq*, 127-128.

²⁸⁷ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 387.

Rumsfeld would toss that group of senior diplomats overboard. Steve Hadley called to tell me that Powell was enraged beyond anything that anyone had seen before.”²⁸⁸

The lack of interagency, even inter-office, cooperation is more than dumbfounding. It seems no one made an effort to ensure what policy work had been done on Iraq’s reconstruction was shared with the office now in charge of that task. Feith’s Office of Special Plans reportedly declined to share its postwar planning research; in fact, Garner only discovered the office existed by accident! In other words, DOD was in charge of Iraq, but the office it established to help guide Iraq’s political transition post-conflict did not even know there was a DC-based Pentagon policy office dedicated in part to the same task. On Garner’s account of his first days, “they hadn’t lined up anybody to brief us... we really had to find out what they were doing by word of mouth.”²⁸⁹ Equally shocking, Garner learned of the State Department’s Future of Iraq Project (a study conducted with significant input of Iraqis about regime change in their country) when its director, Thomas Warrick, asked him an insightful question at an inter-agency retreat. In light of this, it is not altogether surprising that the time ORHA had to devote to Iraq was spent planning for the wrong problems. Garner would be replaced, and ORHA revamped, within weeks to arriving in the country’s capitol.

²⁸⁸ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 387.

²⁸⁹ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 52-53.

Who Was Actually Responsible for Reconstruction?

Although the principals disagree on many of the details—a fact which itself testifies to the severity of the conflicts between and within the various agencies involved in Iraq reconstruction—it can be concluded with a reasonable degree of certitude that General Franks was ultimately responsible for Iraq's reconstruction. Jay Garner reported to Franks, and ORHA was a part of the CENTCOM architecture (although precisely how it fit into it, and its exact relationship to CENTCOM's parallel planning office, JTF-4, remains a matter of some dispute even today).²⁹⁰ In one respect Franks' predominance is unquestionable: for all practical purposes, as regional commander in charge of CENTCOM and the American military apparatus in Iraq, he and only he had the authority to command the resources that would be necessary to secure the country and create the institutions of the new regime. On Feith's account,

Once he overthrew Saddam Hussein's regime, Franks would become responsible for governing Iraq. Rumsfeld had been clear that he did not want that responsibility fragmented and distributed among separate chains of command. The Secretary anticipated that, at some point, President Bush might appoint a civilian administrator for Iraq, to assist (or perhaps relieve) Franks regarding some of the governing tasks. As Franks well understood, Rumsfeld nevertheless intended to retain personal responsibility for the whole range of Iraqi reconstruction tasks.²⁹¹

And yet, Franks has been widely portrayed as uninterested in Phase IV of the war, Iraq's post-“shock and awe” reconstruction. Jay Garner complained that that it was difficult to obtain military support for very important, and oftentimes basic, tasks including security

²⁹⁰ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*; Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 54-55.

²⁹¹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 319.

and transportation.²⁹² Bob Woodward claims that Franks did not believe himself to be in charge of reconstruction planning; he reports that Franks came away from the October 15th unity of command meeting relieved that reconstruction was not his responsibility. His operations' director, Air Force Major General Victor E. Renuart, is said to have remarked "'it sounds to me like OSD Policy"—that is, Feith's office—"has responsibility for planning post-conflict and our responsibility is security. And we don't own the reconstruction stuff." To this, Woodward claims Franks replied "That's the way I look at it too."²⁹³

Most commentators agree with Woodward, locating culpability for the lack of pre-war planning with the Defense Department. Whether its civilian leaders or military commanders were responsible for planning is a debate that will perhaps never be solved. Many single out Douglas Feith's office for particular censure; others, CENTCOM under Franks. Franks' own memoir, not surprisingly, generally agrees with Woodward's account. The General routinely discusses his part in Phase IV of the Iraq war (post-hostility operations) in terms of "stability operations"—as though his responsibility was limited to securing and stabilizing the country.²⁹⁴ Reconstruction, of course, requires security; but it requires much else besides. Franks seems to have believed DOD's civilian leadership would be responsible for virtually everything else. Near the end of *American Soldier*, he writes,

²⁹² Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 350.

²⁹³ Bob Woodward, *State of Denial*, 318.

²⁹⁴ Tommy Franks, *American Soldier* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 366.

the military coalition would liberate Iraq, set conditions for civilian authority to stand-up a provisional government supported by Coalition stability forces, and provide security until Iraq could field her own security forces—a common sense approach to a complex problem... *Washington would be responsible for providing the policy*—and, I hoped, sufficient resources—to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people: jobs, power grids, water infrastructure, schools, hospitals, and the promise of prosperity.²⁹⁵

Paul Bremer, Garner’s eventual replacement and head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, also believed that “responsibility for ‘post-hostility operations’ had been removed from General Franks.”²⁹⁶ Feith, for his part, vehemently denies that either ORHA or his small office at the Pentagon could ever have been responsible for planning Iraq’s reconstruction: “The notion that Rumsfeld would take responsibility for postwar planning or operations away from the CENTCOM commander before the war—and give it to his Pentagon-based policy advisor—is ludicrous.”²⁹⁷ Feith’s office did not have the resources, let alone the respect, such an assignment would have required.

That it was Franks who spectacularly underestimated the requirements of Phase IV in Iraq—notwithstanding his post-war claim that he realized as early as December 2001 that reconstruction could well “prove more challenging than major combat operations”—would seem to be established by the fact it was General Franks who recommended that President Bush “make an address that sounded to both the U.S. audience and the international community like a victory speech” (this, according to army historians).²⁹⁸ That speech, delivered by the President in front of a “Mission Accomplished” banner on the USS Abraham Lincoln May 1st, 2003, is today the enduring symbol of America’s ill-

²⁹⁵ My Emphasis. Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, 424.

²⁹⁶ L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 24.

²⁹⁷ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 318.

²⁹⁸ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 143; Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, 352

planned occupation of Iraq. According to the *On Point II* study, Franks may have initially declared an end to Phase III of the war as early as 16 April, 2003, only three weeks after the campaign began.²⁹⁹ (General Sanchez, subsequently the ranking commander in theater, would maintain, in contrast, that Phase III of the war—major combat operations—persisted through most of 2003.)

One thing seems clear amidst the finger-pointing: according to the memoirs available to this point, when it came to Iraq's reconstruction, no principal believed himself responsible “for providing the policy”—that is, operationalizing the overarching strategic plan settled on at the White House by providing the planning papers, the memos, the logistical guidance, and the resources that those hard at work on the ground desperately needed. The Contemporary Operations Study Team delicately suggests DOD's approach to nation-building was shaped by Candidate Bush's “overall wary attitude to what was sometimes called nation-building.”³⁰⁰ There was no real internalization of the grand war aims of the Bush Doctrine, no serious effort to modify DOD's approach to war in a way that would support the aim of building a new form of government in a region historically resistant to liberal democracy. The President was articulating an ambitious strategy, but those responsible for implementing it either did not understand the scope of the task, or they believed its most difficult components would be handled by some other organization.

To make matters worse, Franks was not an easy man to work with. While the General in command asserts that he believed DC-based policy advisors were in charge of

²⁹⁹ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, .

³⁰⁰ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 70.

reconstruction planning, he certainly did not act as though Feith's opinions on Iraq's reconstruction were of any real consequence. Feith makes clear more than once (though always very politely) that his working relationship with Franks was not good. For instance, "knowing Franks was easily annoyed with advice from Washington," Feith explains that he took the trouble to deliver to CENTCOM the operational directives his policy office did draft by way of intermediaries within CENTCOM.³⁰¹

Franks, for his part, is not so polite in describing his relationship with Feith. In *American Soldier*, Franks writes "I generally ignored his [Feith's] contributions... Rumsfeld never allowed Feith to interfere with my business. I was thankful for that." In fact, the General had so little respect for Feith that the notion that OSD could effectively have taken the lead on Iraq's reconstruction—considering that Franks and CENTCOM commanders would have to implement those plans in theater—quite beggars belief. According to Franks, by January of 2002 Feith was already "getting a reputation around here [CENTCOM] as the dumbest fucking guy on the planet."³⁰² In other words, if Feith was in charge of reconstruction policy, he was not taken seriously enough to affect its implementation.

The disagreement surrounding Phase IV planning responsibility will never be settled to the satisfaction of the principals involved. On the basis of interviews conducted in 2008 with Secretary Rumsfeld and other principals, as well as the various memoirs published to this point, the Special Investigator for Iraq's Reconstruction concludes that Secretary

³⁰¹ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 365

³⁰² Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, 330, 362

Rumsfeld “directed the planners [at CENTCOM, at this point commanded by Tommy Franks] not to prepare for a military administration in Iraq after Saddam’s regime fell” in the fall of 2001 when he first ordered revisions to General Zinni’s invasion plan for Iraq. Initially, it seems everybody shared the impression that, “others in the government, probably the Department of State, would handle the governance aspects of ‘Phase IV.’”³⁰³

When DOD argued for—and received—command primacy in Iraq at the end of 2002, however, they neither devoted sufficient resources to Reconstruction planning, nor leveraged the assets in other parts of the U.S. government that had the experience and resources to contribute to the task.³⁰⁴ Neither Secretary Rumsfeld nor General Franks and CENTCOM planners, for reasons that remain unclear, seem not to have appreciated the significance of the decision. Army historians confirm this, at least to the extent forces on the ground believed guidance would still be coming from DC: “CENTCOM and CFLCC prewar plans assumed that military forces would receive strategic guidance from ORHA once major fighting ended and post conflict operations began.”³⁰⁵ It is possible that the civilian leadership failed to properly communicate the scope of CENTCOM’s responsibilities to DOD’s military command, including Franks; it is also possible that no one at DOD appreciated what reconstruction would entail and more or less expected the hardest part of the job had been or would be delegated to somebody else.

³⁰³ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 5.

³⁰⁴ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 8.

³⁰⁵ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 149.

As late as May, 2008, the finger-pointing persisted at the highest levels. In written comments to Special Investigator assigned to assess Iraq's reconstruction, Donald Rumsfeld asserts,

I do not recall, nor do others present in the numerous discussions with General Franks, giving any guidance that could be interpreted as requesting CENTCOM not plan for Phase IV post-war operations, as General Franks will attest. Nor would I have minimized its importance.³⁰⁶

Michael Fitzgerald, CENTCOM's Chief of War Plans, countered Rumsfeld's assertion in equally unequivocal terms: "We, CENTCOM, were not in charge of designating and developing the government, determining who would be responsible in immediate post-conflict."³⁰⁷

The series of misunderstandings and misperceptions responsible for this planning failure would be the stuff of comedy if the consequences were not so real, so inexcusably tragic. In light of the various memoirs published to this point, the Inspector General's report on this phase of the war and the early reports assembled by the Army's Contemporary Operations Study Team, it appears Rumsfeld and DC-based policy officials believed Franks was organizing reconstruction. Franks' had real on-the-ground authority in Iraq, but believed CENTCOM was more or less absolved of reconstruction responsibilities extending beyond security. Franks and CENTCOM planners seem to have believed the task had fallen to State, and later, the Pentagon's policy office under Feith. ORHA—to which the task ultimately did fall in fact—was assembled late and somewhat haphazardly; it had a limited mandate, trouble coordinating with CENTCOM, and was organized on

³⁰⁶ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 19.

³⁰⁷ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 19.

the expectation it would be operationalizing policy, not constructing it from the ground up.

To further complicate matters, a month after the war began, ORHA was floundering and was rolled into a separate, larger, organization with an expanded mandate. The Coalition Provisional Authority was headed by Paul Bremer. Bremer, as we will see, conceived of his mandate, his mission, and his authority, in wholly different terms. At the same point in the war, Franks, who was being replaced by General Abizaid as CENTCOM commander, directed General McKiernan, at this point commander of the Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) to leave Iraq, even though CFLCC had been responsible for planning and conducting the Iraq campaign to that point on the military side. Responsibility for Iraq's reconstruction was transferred to V Corps. The Army's Contemporary Operations Study Team explains that

V Corps, a European-based headquarters with a purely tactical mission during the invasion of Iraq and already on the verge of gaining a new commander, would now have to develop the staff, knowledge, and experience to take over for CFLCC, an organization whose focus since 1990 had been Iraq.³⁰⁸

Army historians relate that a number of senior military officers on the ground were absolutely flabbergasted by this decision. General Keane called it a "recipe for disaster"; his interview with the Contemporary Operations Study Team is colored by profanity on this point.³⁰⁹ General Sanchez took over responsibility for the Iraq mission having only just arrived in the theater a few weeks before. Keane underlines the consequences of this

³⁰⁸ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 148.

³⁰⁹ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 145.

decision: “It took us months, 6 or 7 or 8 months, to get some semblance of a headquarters together so Sanchez could at least begin to be effective.”³¹⁰ Jay Garner’s evaluation is similarly scathing. He notes that V Corps was not staffed for the task in terms of experience and seniority; “We took the junior three-star in DOD and put him in charge of the greatest problem in the nation.”³¹¹ As experienced senior CFLCC officers were leaving Iraq, General Sanchez was scrambling to assemble a new team, even as the security situation in the country was rapidly deteriorating. The headquarters under his command would be upgraded in August 2003, but staffing was slow, and the Combined Joint Task Force under his command was not “fully mature” until the Spring of 2004 according to Sanchez’s own Chief of Operations, Major General Thomas Miller.³¹² The general problem at this point was the lack of an overarching campaign plan adequate to the exigencies of Iraq, one that would apply U.S. military force to secure Iraq and begin serious reconstruction efforts. And yet, with the decision to remove CFLCC from the Iraq theater meant that the Army headquarters in theater would be one accustomed to operating at an operational/tactical level. In the first 18 months of America’s Iraq occupation, three different military commands would develop and apply four separate campaign plans.³¹³ Commanders in the field would be left to work from drafts, memos, and briefings, some of their key features constantly under revision.³¹⁴

³¹⁰ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 146.

³¹¹ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 146.

³¹² Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 159.

³¹³ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 161.

³¹⁴ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 162.

If there was one thing everybody believed as the war was beginning, it is that the State Department was not in charge. Perversely, even though its officials undoubtedly possessed the most relevant nation-building expertise and virtually all of the country's Arabists, their role was seriously, and deliberately, limited.

If there is one thing that can be said with confidence, it is that post-conflict operations got off to such a bad start not least because those with the authority to elaborate a plan lacked an understanding of what building a constitutional regime in Iraq would entail; those with an understanding of the task, conversely, were deliberately denied the authority to affect it. In sum, everybody had acceded to the unity of leadership idea for Iraq's reconstruction in principle, but no principal believed he was the leader of the effort in fact.

The only way to avoid the conclusion that incompetence on a monumental scale accounts for the failure to plan for Iraq's reconstruction is to accept what the principals had apparently concluded and attribute their failures to ignorance instead: building a new regime in Iraq was not going to be all that complicated. A number of "what to expect", even "worst-case scenario," assessments were commissioned. The most high-profile of these was conducted by the NSC's Humanitarian Working group, and included officials from the CIA, USAID, the Joint Staff, DOD, State, Treasury, Justice, and Commerce. Created to address "humanitarian contingencies", its nightmare scenario was that the deployment of WMD would cause a humanitarian catastrophe, killing scores and creating as many as 1.1 millions refugees. Its participants concluded what decision-makers at all levels of government had concluded: Iraq's infrastructure and government ministries

would play essential roles in post-war operations.”³¹⁵ Among the “core judgments” arrived at, in the name of one participant: “It was taken as an assumption... that the war would be brief, war damage would be minimal, and oil revenues would finance almost all of reconstruction.”³¹⁶

What About the other Iraq studies?

Critics have called alleged that Defense Department officials neglected to read and actively sought to marginalize prescient strategy papers written explicitly to guide the American occupation of Iraq. The most famous of these was prepared by some two hundred Iraqi exiles and expatriates under the auspices of the State Department. While it is no doubt the case that the papers were not widely disseminated as a result of interagency rivalries, in fairness to CENTCOM and DOD, the thirteen volume, 1,200 page, “Future of Iraq Project,” though prescient in many respects, was not an action plan but a collection of concept papers. Paul Bremer notes in his memoir that even the State Department officials involved in writing the plan did not view it as an administrative guide at all.

Sometime after arriving in Baghdad, I read press reports about a State Department study on the future of Iraq, claiming that it provided a full plan for post conflict activities in the country. Crocker had been deeply involved in the study, so I asked him if it provided a practical “plan” for postwar Iraq. “Not at all,” he told me. Its purpose was to engage Iraqi-Americans thinking about their country’s future after Saddam was ousted.

³¹⁵ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 10.

³¹⁶ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 10.

“It was never intended as a postwar plan,” Crocker noted. When I eventually had a chance to read the fifteen volume study, I agreed.³¹⁷

According to Feith, it was the State Department that declined to develop the concepts articulated in the strategy papers—they didn’t become memos, briefings, or plans suited to guiding operations on the ground—because on the two most controversial issues the Future of Iraq Project rejected State’s approach to reconstruction in favor of the Pentagon’s. In the first place, where State had sought to minimize the role of “externals”, the report itself was written by 17 working groups made up of Iraqis who had fled the Ba’athist tyranny: lawyers, engineers, business people, and other experts living mainly in the West. Second, many of the recommendations assumed the existence of an Iraqi Provisional Authority and were so formulated; State, as we will see, objected to the constitution of an Interim Authority made up of Iraqi externals in the near term in favor of a prolonged period of U.S. rule.³¹⁸

A number of practical difficulties also stood in the way of the report’s capacity to exert a profound impact. In the first place, the majority of the working groups had not even finished their deliberations, much less their reports, by the time the invasion began.³¹⁹ This is certainly not to say the study could not have been put to better use. Summaries of its major findings seem prescient in retrospect. It predicts that former Ba’ath party officials and soldiers purged from the military were likely to “present a destabilizing element, especially if they are left without work or ability to get work.”³²⁰ It does not,

³¹⁷ L. Paul Bremer, *My Year In Iraq*, 25.

³¹⁸ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 377-78.

³¹⁹ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 15.

³²⁰ *The Future of Iraq Project*, 4.3.1.

however, consider it likely that Coalition forces would have to contend with an organized insurgency, or that inter-sectarian violence could bring the country to the brink of civil war.³²¹

The report suggested gradually halving the Iraqi army, and in the mean time using it to support for the transition to democracy. It correctly predicted that U.N. sanctions had exerted a heavier toll on ordinary Iraqis than was widely believed, and that corruption was even more prevalent than most expected—two facts of considerable consequence to the establishment of something resembling a commercial republic. For all the gems buried in it, however, the report is of uneven quality and full of platitudinous generalizations—“unwieldy” and “of varied utility” according to the SIGIR report leaked in December, 2008.³²² The Project’s director, Thomas Warrick, had opportunity to brief the principals at an NSC Executive Steering Group on Iraq and failed to convince anyone of its relevance. According to a 2008 SIGIR interview with Frank Miller, the Chairman of that group, “to planners preparing for war, the Future of Iraq Project did not look like a coherent plan for the postwar period.”³²³ Much as Feith suggests, it was full of general propositions, but far from a blueprint for reconstruction.

To wit, one passage often cited to give the impression that decision-makers ignored advice that might have saved Iraq deals with the relationship between Islam and the new Iraqi state: “This is an important question which ultimately only the people of Iraq can

³²¹ *Contemporary Operations Study Team, On Point II*, 89.

³²² Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 15.

³²³ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 15.

decided upon in the course of their deliberations during the transitional period.”³²⁴ Of course, this is precisely what has occurred, and far from facilitating the march of democracy, open deliberation on this most sensitive matter yielded, as we will see, increased influence for those intent to establish something resembling a theocratic state in Iraq in the Shiite South, as well as the most illiberal features of the country’s constitution. Far from leading to the establishment of a functional constitutional democracy, declining to answer this question in advance—and rather leaving it to Iraqis to sort it out—had the effect of exacerbating religious-sectarian feuds, as well as the radical decentralization that is today an impediment to national reconciliation.

True, had more attention been devoted to The Future of Iraq Project, had serious operational planning been undertaken on the basis of the opinions and concerns of this group of educated Iraqis, a number of Coalition setbacks may well have been avoided. Nonetheless, the problem is surely not that the Pentagon ignored a coherent plan for Iraq because it was developed under State Department auspices—as has often been charged—but rather, that adequate resources were not devoted to the development of a coherent reconstruction plan from the insights contained in this report as well as others. One of the reasons for this: State and DOD had diametrically opposed visions for post-hostility Iraq.

³²⁴ *The Future of Iraq Project*, 8.3.2.

DOD versus State: The Substance of their Dispute on the Ground

Interagency disagreement—and the failure to decisively settle on a single reconstruction approach—is a major cause of the initial political failures in Iraq. If nobody took charge of reconstruction planning after Baghdad’s fall, it is not because favored overarching approaches to post-conflict administration in Iraq did not exist. The State Department and CIA had one vision for Iraq post-Saddam, the Department of Defense quite another. Neither had the opportunity to operationalize their own vision.

State had always envisioned a considerable period of occupation during which the coalition would effectively rule the country as an occupying power. During this period, a group of Iraqis who had lived under Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship, “internals”, would be groomed to take over. Officials at State were concerned that given Iraq’s fractured make-up, Afghanistan’s Karsai model—wherein a provisional government is parachuted in as CENTCOM draws down its administrative authority—would not be likely to succeed in Iraq. State feared that a government made up of expatriate Iraqis would be viewed as illegitimate one, if not a plurality, of Iraq’s main factions. They therefore wanted to proceed slowly and carefully: to build a government that was representative of Iraq’s various religious and ethnic groups over time. In the interim, the country would be governed by a provisional authority, perhaps under a U.N. mandate, but made up primarily of U.S. forces.

State and the CIA expected that it would be a long, frustrating, and expensive proposition. USAID, a State department organization that administers close to \$10

billion annually in foreign aid, cautioned in 2002, that “complete reconstruction to the economic and institutional capacity of 1980 (conditions prior to the Iran-Iraq war) will require years of public investment.”³²⁵ Based on their involvement in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo, USAID was cognizant that building a stable constitutional regime in Iraq would involve a species of development aid that “went beyond merely rebuilding what was destroyed.”³²⁶ There were cognizant, moreover, that Iraqis would require focused and specific help, not just the opportunity to build a regime on their own. As the Inspector General Report on Iraq’s Reconstruction summarizes, USAID believed that

physical rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure would only be one step in a democratic transition. Neighborhoods would need to elect their own governing councils to restore civil order. Teachers and civil servants would have to stay on the job. Job programs, micro-lending, and other economic stimuli would be offered alongside programs that fostered reconciliation...³²⁷

While USAID and the optimists within the U.S. government were united in their goals for Iraq, they could not find common ground in their approach. As the invasion of Iraq neared, the White House was unwilling to commit the resources that would have been necessary to take the approach favored by USAID (an approach USAID informally, and very quietly, estimated would cost \$90 billion, and take up to five years, assuming a favorable security situation and minimal damage to Iraq’s infrastructure).³²⁸

USAID officials feared that the administration’s focus on “‘bricks-and-mortar’ rebuilding” in place of “the ‘softer’ programs that characterized USAID’s favored

³²⁵ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 27.

³²⁶ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 29.

³²⁷ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 29.

³²⁸ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 41.

conflict-transformation approach” would make it difficult to achieve the Administration’s lofty objectives for the new political regime.³²⁹ USAID officials believed the optimists at the White House underappreciated the importance of background capacity-building efforts and less glamorous development project to successful political reform; they failed to appreciate that democratization requires expensive and time-consuming transformations at the local level—both economic development, and the creation of social capital. James Kunder, USAID deputy Assistant Administrator for Asia and the Near East until 2004, would later explain that the reconstruction effort in Iraq ran into trouble because the approach was wrong: “We needed to be thinking at a much different order of magnitude of what is required to reconstruct a failed state, in the context of a U.S. military invasion.”³³⁰

By this point, the decision to lodge unity of command at the Pentagon had been taken at the highest levels but news of it had not trickled down nor was its likely impact apparent. USAID discovered DOD was intending to marginalize its role in Iraq on January 20th, only 61 days before the invasion began. Kunder and his team “were just stunned,” as he put it in a 2008 interview. The Office of the Inspector General concludes that “[w]ith the stroke of his pen, the President superseded the existing system for interagency postwar planning inside the National Security Council.”³³¹ Responsibility was transferred from USAID, an organization that could bring thousands of trained staffers and decades of

³²⁹ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 41.

³³⁰ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 26.

³³¹ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 50.

experience rebuilding countries to bear on Iraq's reconstruction, to ORHA, an organization that did not yet exist in fact.

While USAID continued to plan for humanitarian relief and reconstruction operations, DOD was moving to embrace a very different, and much narrower, guiding approach. Recall that State had, all along, been reluctant to endorse any prescription for regime change in Iraq because they believed governing the country would be a massive task, likely to be beset with unforeseeable but potentially game-altering complications. Colin Powell recalled offering the President an analogy even more vivid than his pottery barn anecdote: "when you hit [Iraq], it's like a crystal glass. It's going to shatter. There will be no government. There will be civil disorder. You'll have 25 million Iraqis standing around looking at each other."³³² This fear underlay not only State's reticence to commit to a strategy advocating regime change, but also its take-it-slow, from-the-bottom-up approach to reconstruction.

DOD, in contrast, expected U.S. troops would be leaving Iraq within months. SIGIR historians explain that under the scenario Rumsfeld envisioned, "the United States would not need to administer the functions of government after major combat operations ceased."³³³ Administrative and security infrastructure was expected to remain in tact through to Phase IV of the campaign. Revealingly, when Jay Garner tried to appropriate money for basic rebuilding tasks, indicating to Rumsfeld he expected the reconstruction

³³² Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 1.

³³³ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 1.

bill would run into the billions, the Defense Secretary replied “My friend... if you think we’re going to spend a billion dollars of our money over there, you are sadly mistaken.”³³⁴

DOD had wrested authority for reconstruction without realizing what it would entail:

The Pentagon and the White House planned to rebuild what the invasion had destroyed, and planned not to destroy very much. It would be up to Iraqis to build a democratic regime of their own, with revenues derived from their massive oil reserves. If the planning for economic development, public works infrastructure, local governance capabilities, even the governmental and administrative apparatus of the national government were lacking, it is because DOD planned to leave everything to Iraqis. This was the rationale underlying the initially very optimistic projections. As John Agresto shows quite decisively, however, Iraqis were not willing to fight, bleed, or compromise for their country at all. Loyalties were narrow, sectarian, and cross-cutting; and social capital extending across the lines of mosque and tribe, next to non-existent.³³⁵

On the political end of the spectrum, Pentagon leadership had expected that Iraqi “externals,” men who had fled Saddam Hussein’s tyranny and were living abroad at the time of the invasion, would play a decisive role in the country’s government from day one. Feith even suggests that the disagreement between State and Defense on the role of Ahmed Chalabi was the most important bone of contention between the two departments. Chalabi was an energetic and by all accounts highly competent Iraqi exile

³³⁴ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 59.

³³⁵ John Agresto, *Mugged by Reality*, 111.

with an equally checkered past. He had headed the National Congress (an umbrella organization that brought together Iraq's non-extremist opposition leaders in exile).

DOD saw a number of benefits to relying on externals, Chalabi in particular. In fact, Garner recalls that Feith suggested he declare Chalabi Iraq's new President in the first days of the occupation; Feith and Wolfowitz made the same suggestion to the President, twice.³³⁶ The major advantage of relying on exiles: they could have been organized before Saddam Hussein's overthrow (and even, they hoped, contribute on the battlefield as soldiers and interpreters). Defense was also concerned to transfer authority to Iraqis as quickly as possible in an effort to avoid the appearance that America was an occupying power, interested in Iraq for (say) its oil. Moreover, externals tended to be more secular than internals; having experienced life under free governments in the West, they would bring a first-hand familiarity with the ethos of constitutional democracy to building a new regime while simultaneously having easier access to the perspective of an Iraqi.

Lastly, and rarely noted, the early transfer of significant authority to an Iraqi government would have permitted what some might call draconian measures (to end the looting, to pacify insurgents, to indict sacred persons or assault mosques being used by enemies of the state, to interrogate and imprison foreign fighters, to suppress enemy propaganda and foreign influence), methods of the sort U.S. forces were afraid even to contemplate. The American occupation was, in many respects, an occupation on eggshells (perhaps the first in history)—not only because the audience at home would not have easily tolerated, say, the summary execution of a few looters for the sake of public order; but from the

³³⁶ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 57.

important calculation that the appearance of undue brutality or insensitivity, especially if religious in nature, could well undermine the U.S. effort to capture Iraqis' hearts and minds. For all these reasons, extreme measures ordered by a government made up of Iraqis would likely have been better received—and would certainly have had less value to a possible insurgency's propaganda campaign—than the same measures ordered by American forces occupying foreign territory.

State, however, vehemently opposed relying on externals because they feared a government of exiles and expatriates would be viewed as illegitimate, and provoke even more resentment than a provisional U.S. administration. Officials in the CIA and the State Department distrusted Chalabi in particular. They had reason to, as it turned out. He used his authority over the de-Ba'athification proceedings to dramatically restrict Sunni involvement in Iraq's new government. For these reasons, they believed crafting a government of internals representative of Iraq's various sects was more important than a quick transfer of authority.

The disagreements between the State and DOD approaches were never resolved in a coherent manner. While the State Department very effectively opposed pre-war efforts to organize and train externals for a large and immediate role in post-Saddam Iraq before the command primacy decision was taken, the Department of Defense was ultimately charged with overseeing the reconstruction effort State had done the most to plan for. The Pentagon's military and civilian leadership agreed that they should aim at transferring authority to Iraqis as quickly as possible, but by the time their authority over Iraq was uncontested, there was not time to prepare a provisional government on the

Afghanistan model. ORHA and CENTCOM ran the country for the first month, and though they had not made as much progress with the externals as had been hoped, Jay Garner was prepared to name an interim Iraqi authority—a council that would share authority with CENTCOM—when he was replaced by Paul Bremer and ORHA’s mandate expanded a month after Baghdad’s fall. Bremer—even though he reported to Donald Rumsfeld at DOD officially—would abruptly adopt something resembling the State Department approach to Iraq, even though the military had not prepared to administrate Iraq over the long, or even medium term.

In sum, State managed to scuttle key elements of the reconstruction approach advocated by Defense in the lead up to war, and Defense, ultimately vested with authority over Iraq, refused to embrace State’s approach when the occupation began even though the ground had not been prepared for its own. The externals to whom Defense would have preferred to turn over massive responsibility were not organized or prepared for the task of governing the country by the time Baghdad fell, rendering it impossible to transfer authority to an organized group of Iraqis quickly as the U.S. had done in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, it remained a paramount objective to avoid the protracted period of U.S. rule State thought necessary to build a government of internals. Inexplicably, the President selected Bremer (a man to head the provisional government who was set on the State Department’s take-it-slow approach), but failed to persuade the military command—still intent on a quick draw down—to support it. Instead of supporting Bremer wholeheartedly, Rumsfeld and the President went on to send Bremer mixed messages—limiting his resources, rushing Iraq’s constitution convention, rushing the

handover of power to an interim Iraqi authority, rushing elections—thereby stymieing the long-term vision Bremer was working from in Iraq. It was at this point that the U.S. military, under Sanchez’ direction, had finally developed a campaign plan suited to Bremer’s vision for Iraq; the decision to role up the CPA early in favor of transferring authority to the IIP was yet another “tectonic plate shift,” in Sanchez’s words, forcing his CJTF to make yet further revisions to his campaign plan.³³⁷ This failure to elaborate a single coherent approach to reconstruction led to a litany of slapdash decisions that, however well intentioned, ultimately served undermine the establishment of a stable, modern, and moderate Iraqi regime.

They Ran too Fast

Critics also claim that an Iraq war and reconstruction developed under General Zinni at CENTCOM in the Clinton years was simply ignored “for being too pessimistic,” as though the administration in general, and Secretary Rumsfeld in particular, were in the habit of ignoring prescient planning if it failed to reflect their hopes. This, again, is an overstatement. A plan for an invasion of Iraq, the product of years of work, did exist; it was known as Concept Plan 1003. According to The US Army Combat Studies Team, Donald Rumsfeld directed Tommy Franks and his staff to develop an up-to-date plan to remove Saddam Hussein and his regime on 27 November, 2001. *On Point II* asserts that Franks “directed a major recasting of these plans” because the 1998 approach “did not

³³⁷ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 164.

reflect either the US military's new capabilities or the reduced capabilities of Iraq's Army."³³⁸ Note that the existing plan demanded large troop numbers not because it foresaw the possibility of civil unrest and an insurgency, but because major combat operations would have required more fire power if the invasion had occurred years earlier. Nonetheless, Zinni's Concept Plan 1003 called for the deployment of 380,000 troops as well as the careful (and practiced) integration of civilian agencies including the Treasury Department and the Agency for International Development.³³⁹ No doubt the extra troops would have been useful after the regime fell.

In contrast, Franks' new plan advocated a "running start." Commencing the invasion with only 170,000 Coalition troops in theatre (the 4th Infantry Division was still in the Mediterranean, and remained there deliberately after it became clear that Turkey would not allow it to deploy through its territory) had its intended effect of catching Saddam Hussein by surprise (and his forces ill-deployed). In fact, Franks' revised plan—by utilizing overwhelming airpower, agile forces, and rapid deployment—achieved a stunning victory if evaluated on the aims of Phase III of the war, major combat operations. Saddam Hussein's regime was toppled in 21 days at minimal cost in terms of U.S. casualties. The problem is surely not that insufficient effort was directed to updating the war plan; nor can it be said that General Zinni's Concept Plan was simply ignored. Rather, the problem was that a key feature of the new plan (and a major reason for its

³³⁸ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 67.

³³⁹ Desert Storm, it bears noting, began with 560,000 troops; cf. Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, xiii; Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 138.

resounding success)—the “running start”—had the effect of undermining the possibility of a successful Phase IV.

Why? Again, the only conceivable explanation is that everybody underestimated the scope of the task to which they were committed.

Franks had deliberately developed a very flexible war plan. He imagined that troops would be added, as needed, to the war effort. By buttressing Coalition forces after combat began to whatever extent necessary, the advantages of tactical surprise would be retained, and the expense of deploying too many troops, avoided. Victory was achieved so quickly, however, that a large contingent of reinforcements were not in place by the beginning of stability operations for the simple reasons that victory was swifter than anyone imagined, and there hardly seemed to be any need for them. *Nobody* envisioned stability operations would be more difficult than major combat operations.

While it is certainly the case that Donald Rumsfeld was a proponent of a faster, lighter, U.S. military, the critics who claim he ignored the Joint Chiefs and CENTCOM planners on the question of force strength in Iraq are mistaken. Prominent voices did dissent. We now know that Colin Powell thought “too few troops were envisioned in the plan,” and expressed his concern to Franks at a Camp David meeting as early as September, 2002.³⁴⁰ More famously, General Eric K. Shinseki (the Army’s Chief of Staff at the time) suggested that “something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers—are

³⁴⁰ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 68.

probably, you know, a figure that would be required.”³⁴¹ Shinseki went on to acknowledge, in the same hearing, that the regional commander in charge, General Franks, would “determine the precise figure.” The Joint Chiefs did, in the end, endorse their regional commander’s evaluation. General Shinseki’s own Vice Chief of Staff, General John Keane, who attended almost every session in the Pentagon’s planning room, explains that while there was some disagreement, the Joint Chiefs ultimately signed off on Franks’ Iraq approach:

The Joint Chiefs asked questions, but when Phase III, Major Combat Operations [*sic*] went to the President it had the thumbprints of the Joint Chiefs on it, as well as Phase IV. That is another thing that is not fully understood. People attacked it as Rumsfeld’s troop list and he kept the size of the force down. It was Tommy’s [Franks] plan and the Army supported it. That is the truth of it.³⁴²

In the end, the priority given to Phase III of the war undermined the possibility of a successful Phase IV. As Franks explains in a 2006 interview with the Contemporary Operations Study Team, he believed the force structure could be adjusted quickly enough even to meet exigencies on the ground after Saddam Hussein’s regime fell:

We don’t know what the force needs to look like for Phase IV, so we can’t and we won’t design a force of 250,000 or 350,000 people. What we will do is we will begin to move forces into the region and when we reach the point where that force is sufficient to remove Saddam Hussein, we will just start running. So it took on the name ‘running start.’³⁴³

In a real sense, then, the invasion was too well-executed, U.S. troops *too* fast out of the gate. Operation Iraqi Freedom began when sufficient troops were amassed to achieve a

³⁴¹ Senate Armed Services Committee, 25 February, 2003; *New York Times*, “Pentagon Contradicts General On Iraq Occupation Force’s Size,” 28 February, 2003.

³⁴² Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 68.

³⁴³ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 67.

military success. *Planners had anticipated that Decisive Offensive Operations would take 125 days*; in fact, Baghdad fell in less than three weeks.³⁴⁴ Phase III was supposed to have established an environment tailored to the requirements of an integrated reconstruction plan, first and foremost among these, a stable country; in fact, Baghdad fell before troops sufficient to provide stability, the first prerequisite for a successful Phase IV, had been assembled. As remarkable, Baghdad fell before concrete plans for post-conflict operations had even been finalized or transmitted to the commanders who would be charged with their implementation. Lieutenant General William Webster, deputy commanding general of CENTCOM's Combined Forces Land Component Command (CLFCC), to which Franks had delegated the bulk of Cobra II planning, told military historians that planning Iraq's reconstruction was subordinated to planning the invasion:

Phase IV was always something we were going to get to when we got Phase III well under way and we knew what forces we were going to have available for this fight... there was seriously not anything but a skeleton of Phase IV until very late.³⁴⁵

One of the most poignant passages in Bremer's memoir is his description of what he witnessed in the hours after his plane touched down in Baghdad—widespread looting, much going on *in front of* American soldiers and tanks; a city out of control—as well as his dismay at the U.S. decision not to try to suppress it. The man who would be charged with directing the effort to reconstruct Iraq rode into a country that was burning. And he perceived that it was burning because of American mistakes: too few troops and rules of

³⁴⁴ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, .

³⁴⁵ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 72.

engagement that prohibited firing on looters, or even enforcing ordinary civil laws.³⁴⁶ As Bremer explains, “according to the CENTCOM briefing in Qatar, we didn’t yet have enough troops in Baghdad to ‘secure key tactical objectives’—traffic circles, bridges, power plants, banks and munitions dumps—and also patrol the streets.”³⁴⁷

And so, American troops did next to nothing as Iraqis raided ministries, destroyed documents, pillaged their museums, and created the impression that the U.S. was unconcerned with law and order in Iraq. The local police melted away, in part because they were facing marauding bands of Iraqi bandits who were better armed than they were; it became instantly clear that the police could not count on the support of the U.S. military, the alien institution that suddenly held a near-monopoly on force in their country, for support. As a result, the administrative and security capacity of Iraq was degraded, and much of the good will America could have hoped for on the part of liberated Iraqis, squandered on short order. As bad, once it became clear that Americans would not act to stop the destruction, the looting became increasingly purposeful. Records essential to governing the country were deliberately destroyed: both in an effort to protect individuals and entities that had been beneficiaries of the previous regime’s crimes, and by members of the old regime trying to “make the task of governing Iraq that much more difficult.”³⁴⁸

The failure to suppress the looting in Baghdad, a consequence (at least partially) of an inadequate number of troops, ranks as one of the biggest operational blunders the U.S.

³⁴⁶ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 141.

³⁴⁷ L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 14.

³⁴⁸ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 115-117.

could have committed. And yet it was not an oversight, but a decision taken at the highest levels. Major General Webster told Army historians that he had heard General McKiernan explain to Iraqi leaders that “The President and the Secretary of Defense have said that we will not declare martial law. We are not going to put our military in a position of enforcing Iraqi laws.”³⁴⁹ The Contemporary Operations Study Group explains that once Baghdad had fallen, “unit commanders were unsure about their role in maintaining law and order.” They point in particular to General Petraeus’ interview, in which he expressed the opinion that CENTCOM guidance’s on Phase IV operations post-Saddam “lacked specific details on tasks and purposes.”³⁵⁰ Planners had focused “primarily on the fight to Baghdad.” The plan for Reconstruction, in contrast, was “relatively general” containing “themes, which seemed to be sound in concept, but the meanings and the operationalizing of those themes... were not very evident to us.”³⁵¹ The *On Point II* study cites from numerous interviews in which commanders on the ground asked “what next” and got answers that failed to provide any concrete guidance.

Army historians explain that over the course of April 2003, as it became increasingly clear that Iraq’s law enforcement entities were not stepping in to fill the vacuum. As such, “U.S. Army units simply transitioned to full spectrum operations without much in the way of detailed guidance or special resources.”³⁵² Few units had any counter-insurgency training; since they lacked an overarching campaign plan for the unexpected situation

³⁴⁹ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 141.

³⁵⁰ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 141.

³⁵¹ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 77.

³⁵² Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 116.

that confronted them, commanders responded differently across the country.³⁵³ One of the reasons the efforts of General Petraeus in Ninawa and Mosul stood out is that he took the initiative to “get started with a broad program of what he called ‘nation-building’” from an early date. He recognized that by waiting for headquarters to provide a “detailed blueprint for the next phase of the operation,” the Coalition risked allowing a threat to emerge. The General explained his departure from DOD’s general approach this way:

The bottom line is we were going to have to do a lot and a big part of it, believe it or not, in the beginning, was just accepting or embracing the fact that we had to get on with [nation-building] because we are, in reality, going to do it—no one else is coming to do it. There may be very little help, if any, and so let’s just get on with it because it is a race against the clock.³⁵⁴

Most commanders did not emulate Petraeus in this regard. By late April of 2003, looting and criminality had escalated dramatically. With this, the best “window of opportunity that could have been exploited to produce the conditions for the quick creation of a new Iraq” had all but closed.³⁵⁵

Virtually every commentator dwells on the psychological impact of the looting. John Agresto notes that America’s apparent unwillingness to stop the looting engendered contempt on the part of Iraqis who could not understand how a superpower that had

³⁵³ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 116.

³⁵⁴ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 117.

³⁵⁵ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 25.

achieved easy and decisive victory over an entrenched tyrant could not keep order in the streets.³⁵⁶ Army historians' criticism is more scathing yet. They note that

for many Iraqis, the looting and disorder became signs of the Coalition's inability or unwillingness to maintain order. From the start, some Iraqis assumed Americans did not care about the looting, or that they even welcomed the destruction. One cleric told a journalist, 'I simply cannot understand how your soldiers could have stood by and watched. Maybe, [the Americans] are weak, too. Or maybe they are wicked.'³⁵⁷

In sum, then, the problem was not that Anthony Zinni's Concept Plan for Iraq was ignored—to the contrary, great effort was put into revising it, or at least the first half of it—but that the revisions failed to develop a coherent bridge between major combat operations and post-hostility operations. Pre-war planning for Phase IV was so inadequate, in turn, for a number of reasons. On the military side, those involved in the planning have admitted that their failure stemmed, in part, from a lack of time and resources. While prosecuting one war in Afghanistan, CENTCOM was charged with making dramatic revisions to the existing Iraq plan; it began, understandably, at the beginning—by planning the invasion. Baghdad fell before they had opportunity to make plans for the war's subsequent phase.

Another reason greater urgency and resources were not devoted to preparing for Phase IV: Franks wanted little to do with it, as we have already established. The *On Point* study summarizes his message to the Joints Chiefs and Defense Department this way: "You pay attention to the day after, and I'll pay attention to the day of."³⁵⁸ One CENTCOM planner, Major Ray Eiriz, told an interviewer that "CENTCOM never wanted military

³⁵⁶ John Agresto, *Mugged By Reality*, 21.

³⁵⁷ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 91.

³⁵⁸ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, .

administration and the Joint Staff and OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] had not decided what it would look like.”³⁵⁹ This, of course, recalls the initial disagreement between State and Defense, the former insisting on a protracted period of military rule that DOD officials, civilian and armed forces alike, objected to in principle. In other words, no coherent early decision was ever consciously taken and deliberately enacted on one of the most basic questions of all: whether Iraq would be administered by the U.S. military, or a civilian body (made up of some combination of Americans, Iraqis, and other members of an international coalition). One must presume this accounts for the utter schizophrenia evident in the first month of U.S. occupation: first, ORHA (a brand new civilian organization) uneasily shared reconstruction responsibilities with CENTCOM; then Jay Garner and ORHA were replaced by Paul Bremer’s more powerful CPA. One of Bremer’s first acts, in turn, was to dissolve the transitional authority made up of Iraqis and which Garner had labored to assemble, one that had hoped, moreover, to assume significant responsibility; Bremer, favored of a prolonged U.S. occupation, as we will see. On the military end, as we have seen, DOD transferred the Iraq command from CFLCC to the less well-prepared V Corps.

Lieutenant Colonel John Agoglia, one of the main planners at CENTCOM, makes an even more damning admission. As Gordon and Trainor recount a 2003 interview, “CENTCOM planners had been told early on that others in the government would assume the principle responsibilities for Phase IV... But for months the planners could never locate the officials who were supposedly preparing for Iraq’s future”; in the

³⁵⁹ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 139.

Colonel's words, "there wasn't a whole lot of intellectual energy being focused on Phase IV."³⁶⁰ Another General, CFLCC's deputy commander, William Webster, explained that "all along, General Franks said that the Secretary of Defense wanted us to quickly leave and turn over post-hostilities to international organizations (IOs) and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) led by ORHA. That was the notion."³⁶¹ In other words, DOD, its civilian and military command, wanted very badly to avoid taking over the administration of Iraq and clung to the notion this would be possible until escalating violence made it abundantly clear that no other organization could handle the task.

The conclusion, then, is a familiar one: reconstruction failures in Iraq were the result of mistaken assumptions. Too few troops were dispatched, too little energy devoted to planning the country's rebirth, because there was a consensus that success would rather easily be achieved. First, virtually everyone was convinced Iraq's administrative and security infrastructure would be utilizable for reconstruction, that Iraqis would do most of the administering and securing under a new leadership—initially the U.N., soon afterward, a provisional Iraqi authority, ultimately, an elected Iraqi government. Second, nobody predicted widespread looting, violence, ultimately an insurgency. Many, in contrast, expected Americans would be greeted as liberators. While cooperation among the Shiite and especially the Kurds was indeed impressive at the war's outset, their leaders' enthusiastic cooperation quickly morphed into plays for power on the basis of narrow sectarian agendas—not so much from an eagerness to build an inclusive modern

³⁶⁰ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 139-140.

³⁶¹ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 141.

state as from a desire to increase their influence in post-Saddam Iraq from parochial concerns. Against the backdrop of the deteriorating security situation, a new civilian organization was created that would take a dramatically different approach to Iraq's reconstruction.

Bremer's Mistakes

Paul Bremer arrived in Baghdad Monday, May 12th, almost two months after the invasion of Iraq began. The Contemporary Operations Study Team notes that "the decisions made and actions taken in May 2003 proved pivotal to the 18 months that followed."³⁶² They set Iraq on a trajectory from which the country has not yet fully recovered.

Bremer considered himself the President's personal envoy, and believed he reported directly to the Commander in Chief. In his book, he explains that he had the President's wholehearted support, which came with "full authority to bring all the resources of the American government to bear on Iraq's reconstruction."³⁶³ He presents President Bush as being "emphatically" committed to his (Bremer's) vision and timetable, and goes so far as to quote the President to this effect: "We'll stay until the job is done. You can count on my support irrespective of the political calendar or what the media might say."³⁶⁴ In a 2008 interview with the Inspector General, Bremer puts an even finer point on it: "[t]he

³⁶² Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 25.

³⁶³ L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 11.

³⁶⁴ L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 12.

President's instructions to me... when I had lunch with him alone on May 6th, were that we're going to take our time to get [Iraq] right... The President had effectively, though perhaps not formally, changed his position on the question of short or long occupation."³⁶⁵

Bremer believed the “easy transfer” of power approach—that is, the approach which had, to that point, guided DOD—amounted to a “reckless fantasy.”³⁶⁶ He explains that the constitutional democracy he was tasked to help build would require a time-consuming investment to create what he calls “social ‘shock-absorbers’”: those features of a stable, modern, and moderate society—he enumerates, “a free press, trade unions, political parties, professional organizations”—that allow its democratic institutions to function as they do in the West.³⁶⁷ Finding “no Iraqi political leaders inside the country commanding a significant following to whom we could hand over power,” and believing most of those working with ORHA to be incompetent, he immediately backtracked on Garner's plan to establish an Interim Iraqi Authority. This decision left a number of prominent Iraqis, those expecting to be named to the interim government and who had devoted considerable time and effort to Garner's initiatives “completely flabbergasted.”³⁶⁸ That they were less enthusiastic to cooperate with Bremer's organization going forward should not have been altogether surprising.

³⁶⁵ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 96.

³⁶⁶ L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 12.

³⁶⁷ L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 12.

³⁶⁸ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 99.

In place of an interim authority made up of Iraqis, Bremer's first act (by signing CPA Regulation Number 1) was to establish in the place of ORHA a provisional government with dramatically expanded authority under international law. The Coalition Provisional Authority vested in itself all "executive, legislative, and judicial authority," what effectively put Bremer in charge of the country for what was to be a 14-month U.S. occupation.³⁶⁹ Senior Pentagon officials, including the Secretary of Defense to whom Bremer officially reported, "found Bremer's new course unexpected"; Rumsfeld believed Bremer was on board with DOD's basic approach to Iraq which still called for the "transfer power to an Interim Iraqi Authority as soon as possible."³⁷⁰ The unexpected reversal led Iraqis, especially its aspiring politicians, to question with a new urgency America's motivations. On Ali Allawi's account, "Uncertainty reigned, while there was dark talk about the imposition of a colonial regime. Many Iraqi leaders felt that the USA had been duplicitous in its negotiations and that there had always been a parallel track that aimed at the installation of a 'pro-consul' figure."³⁷¹

Along with the decision to formally announce a protracted American occupation—necessary in his mind to build the requisite supports for a non-despotic regime after decades of authoritarian rule—Bremer's first two orders are among the most criticized decisions of the war. On May 16th, CPA Order No. 1 mandated the "De-Baathification of Iraqi society," and removed from public life all Iraqis who had held the top four ranks

³⁶⁹ CPA, "Coalition Provisional Authority Regulation Number 1," available at http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030516_CPAREG_1_The_Coalition_Provisional_Authority_.pdf

³⁷⁰ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 99.

³⁷¹ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 107.

under Saddam Hussein's regime; on May 23rd, CPA Order No. 2 disbanded Saddam Hussein's military and intelligence institutions. At a stroke, hundreds of thousands of proud men were humiliated and relegated to the unemployment lines. The Contemporary Operations Study Team has noted the magnitude of these decisions:

These orders, designed to signal the end of Saddam's tyranny and the beginning of a new era, removed thousands of Sunni Arab Iraqis from political power, creating the perception that Sunni Arabs would have limited power in a new Iraq, fostering a huge unemployment problem, and leaving Iraqi institutions without bureaucratic or technical leadership. Many Coalition military figures believed at the time that these important CPA decisions created a pool of disaffected and unemployed Sunni Arabs from which a growing insurgency could later recruit.³⁷²

Bremer insists in his memoir that the orders were necessary in order to prove to Iraqis that the new regime would be dramatically unlike the old; they guaranteed Iraqis Saddam Hussein's instruments of repression would not be a factor as Iraq built its future.³⁷³ Shiites appreciated the gesture, and fought hard for thoroughgoing de-Ba'athification; on the Sunni side, it had the opposite effect, contributing not a little to the insurgency in a number of important ways. Unbelievably, neither order was discussed with the military leadership. Generals were "surprised, shocked" when they were informed of the decisions.³⁷⁴ CENTCOM commanders had devoted time and energy to cultivating important relationships with Iraqi Generals (all of them former Ba'athists) and had expected to leverage the forces they still commanded during the reconstruction period. Instead, they were told to build a new military leadership from the junior officers unaffected by the deBa'athification order, and to essentially recruit a new volunteer

³⁷² Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 26-27.

³⁷³ L. Paul Bremer, *My Year In Iraq*, 54.

³⁷⁴ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 94-95.

army—a task that would take years to complete. Its dollar cost was also high. According to the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, by 2008, the U.S. Congress had appropriated almost \$23 billion dollars to rebuild Iraq’s security services, what amounted to “by far the single largest Iraq reconstruction expense.”³⁷⁵ DOD had assumed the Iraqi military would remain in tact, and that a part of its leadership would be, rather easily, induced to support Coalition efforts. In fact, the new Iraqi army proved utterly hapless in the initial years of the insurgency; a year on, as fighting was intensifying, of the “200,000 Iraqi security force personnel rushed into service... no more than 5,000” were “fully trained and equipped.”³⁷⁶ When pitted against insurgents, some refused to fight; others actually switched sides.³⁷⁷ Worse yet, as General Petraeus would later explain, the order to disband ignited nationalist impulses against the Coalition and created “tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of additional enemies for the Coalition”³⁷⁸ Today, Iraq’s army is larger than it was under Saddam Hussein (recall that the Future of Iraq Project had called to cut its size in half gradually) and it is utterly dominated by Shiite Iraqis. It is difficult to imagine the military will not demand an increasingly large political role as American forces withdraw.

So, also, DOD assumed that Iraq’s administrative apparatus would continue to function, that it could relatively easily be directed toward the competent achievement of different ends in a new regime. Lieutenant General Wallace, a V Corps commander when

³⁷⁵ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 360.

³⁷⁶ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 162.

³⁷⁷ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 161-162.

³⁷⁸ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 105.

command was transferred to it from CFLCC, explains the significance of the Bremer's decision to purge Ba'athists from government this way: "The de-Baathification meant that the bureaucracy that made Iraq work was no longer allowed to help make Iraq work."³⁷⁹ Lieutenant General Sanchez puts a finer point on it: "The impact of this de-Ba'athification order was devastating... it eliminated the entire government and civic capacity of the nation." Indeed, 30,000 administrators—some of them teachers, and many of them Ba'athists in name only (membership was often a condition of employment and a prerequisite to advancement)—were summarily dismissed. Bremer's decisions thus further undermined DOD's too easy assumptions about Iraq's reconstruction. His first two orders are seen, by virtually every commentator, as having launched (or at least fuelled) the debilitating insurgency that soon emerged.³⁸⁰

That Bremer and Rumsfeld both believed they had the President's unconditional support complicated matters significantly. Bremer was trying to build a constitutional regime from the ground up, and thought he had time to take an approach resembling the one State had been arguing for. To his surprise, he encountered constant pressure from DOD and, it would turn out, the White House, not just to move toward a transfer of authority as quickly as possible, but to expedite nation-wide elections and the ratification of a new constitution, all of this under a rapidly deteriorating security situation. This led, as we will see in Chapter 4, to clumsy political errors that permitted the use of important

³⁷⁹ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 96.

³⁸⁰ cf. Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 159.

democratic institutions and procedures to achieve narrow partisan objectives at high cost to the possibility of a unified Iraq.

Either the State Department's or DOD's approach, pursued coherently and resolutely, may well have had some chance of creating a stable regime much more responsive to the citizenry than Saddam Hussein, if not quite a modern liberal democracy. But the haphazard series of disjointed decisions that were taken, as slapdash lowest common denominator solutions tend to, produced the advantages of neither approach and the drawbacks of both. The result: ill-conceived initiatives and operational disasters that created a vacuum for, and then fuelled, the brutal insurgency that brought the nation to the brink of civil war and the U.S. to the brink of ignominious withdrawal.

Neoconservative Assumptions

It is an unfortunate irony that for all their emphasis on the importance of regime, neoconservative policymakers—by all accounts, those within the administration who were the most ardent supporters of regime change—dramatically underestimated the challenges the U.S. would face establishing a democratic regime in Iraq. Were it not for this misunderstanding, the most enthusiastic supporters of regime change might have done a better job communicating the scope of the objective to DOD; they might have even selected individuals who were sensitive to many of the challenges that did emerge to lead the effort. Instead, civilian policymakers as well as military officials failed to

recognize the stunning disproportion between the ends of the Iraq war and the means being mobilized to achieve them.

Some thought it would be relatively easy, and went so far as to describe the task in infuriatingly lackadaisical terms. Kenneth Adelman, who served Donald Rumsfeld on three occasions over the course of his career, will be remembered in part for his glib overconfidence during his final stint. He posited, in op-eds for *The Washington Post* published in the lead-up to invasion and in its immediate aftermath, that “demolishing Hussein’s military power and liberating Iraq would be a cakewalk.”³⁸¹ Why was Adelman so sure it would be easy? He offered four “simple” and “responsible” reasons: “(1) It was a cakewalk last time; (2) they’ve become much weaker; (3) we’ve become much stronger; and (4) now we’re playing for keeps.” Amazingly, he did not consider that the scope of U.S. aims would separate the two campaigns—in 1991, U.S. forces aimed to push Saddam’s army from Kuwait, thereafter to contain his military capabilities to a limited sphere; in 2003, the U.S. sought to topple Iraq’s ruler and build an entirely new regime. Leaving it to Saddam Hussein to keep Iraq together (albeit under extensive restrictions) permitted the U.S., in 1991 but not in 2003, to ignore that host of complications—Iraq’s sectarian dynamic, the country’s dearth of political capital and individualist *mores*, the political claims of Islam, Iran’s meddling, etc.—that would prove so determinative in the absence of a strongman.

³⁸¹ Ken Adelman, “Cakewalk in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 13, 2002; cf. “‘Cakewalk’ Revisited,” *Washington Post*, April 10, 2003.

Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense, exuded a similar overconfidence as the U.S. girded for war. In a speech delivered 11 March, 2003, he said this:

Over and over, we hear reports of Iraqis here in the United States who manage to communicate with their friends and families in Iraq, and what they are hearing is amazing. Their friends and relatives want to know what is taking the Americans so long. When are you coming?

In a meeting last week at the White House, one of these Iraqi-Americans said, 'A war with Saddam Hussein would be a war for Iraq, not against Iraq.'

The Iraqi people understand what this crisis is about. Like the people of France in the 1940s, they view us as their hoped-for liberator. They know that America will not come as a conqueror.³⁸²

There was a real sense that removing Saddam Hussein would be sufficient to provoke a major transformation for the better, perhaps even beyond Iraq. Wolfowitz, perhaps better than any other proponent of the Iraq war, voices the idea that free government would thrive were only its dictator to be removed. A bitter insurgency targeting American troops as well as Iraqis who supported them, civil war in Iraq, and a strengthened Iran—these weren't even unlikely contingencies; they were unimaginable.

To judge from resource allocation, the Pentagon shared this estimation; the civilian leadership believed Phase III, major combat operations, would be much more difficult than Phase IV, reconstruction. Wolfowitz explained in February of 2003 to the House Budget Committee that the “higher-end [troop strength] predications” that had been floated by Shinseki and others were “wildly off the mark.” He went on to explain that “it’s hard to conceive that it would take more force to provide stability in post-Saddam

³⁸² Paul Wolfowitz, “Address to Veterans of Foreign Wars in Washington, D.C.,” 11 March, 2003. <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=359>

Iraq thank it would take to conduct the war itself... Hard to imagine.” The military command at DOD, as we have seen, shared this evaluation. In the last week of April, the deployment of the I2th Cavalry Division, planned under the running start doctrine, was cancelled, a decision Franks has taken responsibility for.³⁸³ He told the President the mission had effectively been accomplished sometime before 1 May, 2003.

Others, less prone to wishful thinking, did not believe constructive regime change in Iraq would be easy. They did, however, generally share Richard Perle’s 2003 assessment of Iraq, namely, that the country was “a very good candidate for democratic reform...”³⁸⁴ They believed this because they saw in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq a more or less secular social state, a developed middle class, an educated population, and an apparent enthusiasm to join the globalizing world. Underneath this veneer, maintained with great difficulty by a regime dedicated to breaking spirits, censoring dissent, and exerting control through pervasive fear, there existed a very different and unappreciated reality. The middle class had been utterly decimated by U.N. sanctions, and Saddam Hussein was managing, only with great difficulty and through increased concessions, to hold the country together in the face of surging Islamic sentiment and intensifying crosscutting loyalties (as we will see in the next chapter).

If these influential policy makers did not think transforming Iraq would be a cakewalk, neither did they recognize that its sectarian makeup and dominant religion would present special, complicating, impediments to the goal of establishing a liberal democracy in the

³⁸³ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 142.

³⁸⁴ David Rose, “Neo Culpa,” *Vanity Fair*, January 2007.

<http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2006/12/neocons200612>

heart of the Middle East. In retrospect, Perle's expectation, voiced in these terms in February 2003, today seems hopelessly naïve:

It won't be Westminster overnight, but great democracies of the world didn't achieve the full, rich structure of democratic governance overnight. The Iraqis have a decent chance of succeeding.³⁸⁵

As Douglas Feith insinuates in an interview with the *New Yorker* the same year, at the heart of this confidence lies an assumption: the assumption that the West's model of government—its devotion to the rights and liberties of the individual—would resonate in every breast. If members of the administration expected Iraqis to greet Americans as liberators—as the Neoconservatives *did*, and as some Iraqis did in fact (at first)—it is because they believed that every human being, at some level and in spite of whatever countervailing impulses, recognizes that America stands for individual freedom and equality of opportunity above all else. And that, whatever America's failings, it aspires to the noblest of principles, ideals that anchor a way of life worth fighting for. As Feith put it succinctly before the invasion began, “this administration does not believe there is an inherent incompatibility” between free government and “either Muslim culture, or Arab culture.” This notion (again, in Feith's words) that “some of the basic institutions of democracy—not any particular democratic system, but some of the basic institutions of democracy—had universal appeal,” was ultimately the theoretical insight, or the assumption, that made regime change a plausible goal.³⁸⁶ It is the idea that inspires the noblest passages in the President's Second Inaugural Address, and much earlier than that,

³⁸⁵ Quoted in David Rose, “Neo Culpa,” *Vanity Fair*, January 2007.

³⁸⁶ Nicholas Lemann, “After Iraq,” *The New Yorker*, 17 February, 2003.
http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2003/02/17/030217fa_fact

speeches delivered at AEI and elsewhere. If true, it is the innate human inclination or predilection that makes the democratization of the Middle East not only a worthy goal, but under the best circumstances, a credible one too. The “if”, however, be may of greater consequence than anybody initially appreciated. A desire for freedom may well be universal. This does not mean the capacity for tolerant majoritarian rule—rule that is limited, and administered on equal terms—is also universal. It is not impossible or self-contradictory to find a group of individuals in which each simultaneously desires freedom for him or herself, while at the same time proving utterly incapable of organizing the majoritarian institutions of a state in such a way that protects the rights and liberties of all. It is entirely possible, that is, to desire at once freedom for oneself and dominion over others. The recognition (and internalization of the notion) that others have an unalienable right to their own lives and liberties—to pursue happiness how they themselves define it within a generous sphere protected by laws that apply equally to all—does not come from nowhere, especially not in a country with a history of brutal sectarian discord fuelled by ingrained religious dissimilarity.

David Frum, who with Perle wrote a book called *An End to Evil* in 2003 urging U.S. intervention in Iran and Syria as well, today acknowledges that his support for intervention in the Middle East aimed at democratization was motivated by an overconfidence of exactly this sort: “the hope that *fairly easily* this world governed by law, the world of the North Atlantic, can be extended to include the Arab and Muslim Middle

East.”³⁸⁷ Once again, this project aims to take up the question these policymakers neglected: namely, what does constitutional government in the West require of the citizenry in terms of *mores* and sacred opinions; and are the dominant sacred opinions in the Islamic world as hospitable to the form of government taken for granted in the West?

Fukuyama had exactly this overconfidence in mind when he points to what seems, on his argument, to be the error at the heart of the Neoconservative foreign policy (and the reason he distanced himself from his erstwhile cadre). He contends regime change was conceived in terms far too optimistic, and at the same time, much too simplistic—“not as a matter of the slow and painstaking construction of liberal and democratic institutions but simply as the negative task of getting rid of the old regime.”³⁸⁸ Robert Jervis is absolutely right to note that the entire democratization project operated on the “implicit belief... that democracy can take hold when the artificial obstacles to it are removed.”³⁸⁹ So impressed were Neoconservatives by the sudden disintegration of European communism, and the impressive, rapid, strides made in the former Soviet Bloc toward stable, relatively limited, and constitutional government at the end of the twentieth century, that an unspoken assumption emerged: would not the oppressed, anywhere and everywhere, take freedom *from any hand*—excitedly, greedily—as a hungry man would snatch a piece of bread?

It is a beautiful notion, but Saddam Hussein’s Iraq is not quite Conrad’s Russia. And Eastern Europe is a long way from the Islamic world in terms of its history, its religion,

³⁸⁷ My emphasis; David Rose, “Neo Culpa.”

³⁸⁸ Francis Fukuyama, *America at a Crossroads*, 63.

³⁸⁹ Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era*, 82.

and its intellectual points of integration with the West. It is possible—no, it is certain—that political Islam today is more powerful as a worldview, even internally coherent to a greater degree, than Soviet Communism ever was. Amazingly, for all the problems U.S. forces have encountered, this assumption has yet to dissipate entirely in neoconservative circles. A number of the war’s most prominent supports, including some of the men who helped plan it—Richard Perle, Kenneth Adelman, David Frum, and Douglas Feith—have publicly blamed the difficulties encountered in Iraq on errors of implementation, many of them singling out Tommy Franks, Donald Rumsfeld, even President Bush, for brutal censure.³⁹⁰ Adelman’s criticism was particularly harsh, and in a way proportionate to his initial enthusiasm:

I just presumed that what I considered to be the most competent national security team since Truman was indeed going to be competent... They turned out to be among the most incompetent teams in the postwar era. Not only did each of them, individually, have enormous flaws, but together they were deadly, dysfunctional.³⁹¹

Fewer policymakers have admitted that their own assumptions about democracy and Iraq proved gravely flawed, and that their misconceptions played a role in formation of an approach to Iraq that proved entirely inadequate to the noble task they trumpeted.

Fukuyama, whose almost two-decade-old “end of history” thesis captured the neoconservatives’ democratic optimism better than virtually anything else written on the subject, at least struggled to distance himself from the notion that democracy was a more or less universal and inevitable form of government in the aftermath of Iraq. The later

³⁹⁰ David Rose, “Neo Culpa.”

³⁹¹ “Neocons turn on Bush for incompetence over Iraq war,” *The Guardian*, 4 November, 2006.

Fukuyama understands the neoconservatives' error better than most for having shared it so long; as he puts it, "there was a tendency among promoters of the war to believe that democracy was a default condition to which societies would revert once liberated from dictators."³⁹² In most cases, this is probably an overstatement. But, as overstatements often do, his nonetheless contains a useful kernel of truth. DOD failed to plan appropriately for reconstruction because so many planners focused almost entirely on the easier task (overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime) at the expense of thinking seriously about "the slow and painstaking" endeavor the U.S. had committed itself to. Once the dictator was removed, however, popular government organized in such a way as to protect the rights and liberties of the citizenry did not spring into existence.

Instead, old hatreds and long-suppressed sectarian ambitions burst to the surface and those motivated by them marshaled the variety of new means suddenly available—political, religious, violent—to secure the version of Iraq's future they preferred. Those preferences, in turn, far from being inculcated by a long-established civic education championing the value of tolerance, equality, and liberty, were animated by much darker impulses indeed. Put another way, policymakers failed to understand how dramatically citizens in the West have been formed by Western civilization and the political regimes they inhabit. The political character in display in the gentle, neighborly, and more or less tolerant liberal democrats who ubiquitously confine their disputes to a relatively narrow political sphere in Western democracies was imagined to be the default nature of man everywhere. The insurgency revealed a much darker side of human nature, one that had

³⁹² Francis Fukuyama, *America at a Crossroads*, 116.

not been tamed and remolded in Iraq as it has in the West by civilization-level influences that took centuries to exert their accumulated effect. Fukuyama today recognizes as much. He writes that liberalism and pluralism came to reign in the West

only by smashing the existing connections between traditional religion and political power, and by exercising actual power in a pluralistic political space, that Protestantism laid the groundwork for modern secular politics and the separation of church and state. In Europe, this process took several centuries; we can only hope for a more accelerated timetable for Muslims today.³⁹³

Observations such as these, generally made in passing, can be found throughout the writings of the most perceptive criticisms of the Bush Doctrine and the American intervention in Iraq. To date, the suggestion that liberal democracy has essential ideational requirements has not been systematically investigated. Part 2 of this dissertation provides that analysis. Before we turn to the series of revolutions in social consciousness that helped build the modern world, however, consideration of the insurgency sheds light on the nature of the passions—untamed by an Enlightenment or a Reformation—Iraq’s “liberation” unleashed.

³⁹³ Francis Fukuyama, *America at a Crossroads*, 78-79.

CHAPTER III

ANATOMY OF THE INSURGENCY AND THE SURGE

A failure to appreciate the scope of the task to which the President committed the United States in Iraq, and the consequent failure to marshal the country's resources in service to accomplishing it, created the environment under which Iraq's insurgency was able to gather steam. But to ask whether the insurgency (or so devastating an insurgency) could have been avoided is not necessarily equivalent to determining whether, in the absence of the strategic blunders that no doubt exacerbated it, a functioning liberal democracy could have been established in Iraq. The passions that were permitted so violent a manifestation have, indeed, created other serious problems for Iraq's nascent democracy as well. Nonetheless, the first question is the reasonable place to start insofar as the instability wrought by insurgents made the establishment of anything remotely resembling a moderate and modern regime utterly impossible. That was, indeed, the explicit goal of those behind it.

The insurgency began as a Sunni campaign against the Coalition designed to pressure it into abandoning Iraq. They quickly turned from targeting Coalition troops to targeting Iraqi civilians, however—especially those working with the Provisional Authority, and eventually any group vulnerable to indiscriminate slaughter, especially Shiite civilians. The insurgents' sought to prevent the establishment of a Shiite dominated state in Iraq, something majoritarian institutions seemed likely to guarantee given that Iraq's Shiite population amounts to more than 60% of the population with the remaining 35 or 40%

split between two distinct minority groups. To this end, they undertook a strategy designed to provoke U.S. withdrawal by turning Iraq into a quagmire. This led, ultimately, to an effort to provoke a civil war between the Sunni and Shiite populations.

Saddamists and their Allies

The Sunni insurgency had two discernable wings—each formed by a variety of amorphous organizations with their own leadership. The first was made up of a small number of foreign fighters motivated by radical Islamic ideas united with a much larger group of long-suppressed domestic fundamentalists; the second, larger, wing was made of generally more secular Sunni Iraqis (whose most important allegiances tended to be to tribe or to the Ba’ath party).³⁹⁴

According to the *On Point II* study, the core of the more secular group, for the first year the most important wing of the insurgency, was made up of members of the Ba’athist military and intelligence services who had gone underground of their own volition after the war or as a result of the deBa’athification order.³⁹⁵ They doubted there would be a place for them in the new Iraq and feared retribution at the hands of a government democratically elected by Iraq’s Shiite majority. As a result, they believed they had little to lose by fighting the establishment of a new regime.

³⁹⁴ Some assert that a third discernable wing is separable from the second, those held together by, and fighting from, tribal allegiance; Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 179-180; Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 125.

³⁹⁵ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 105.

The extent to which the early insurgency was directed by top-ranking Ba'athists, including Saddam Hussein himself, remains unclear. Nor is it clear whether a sophisticated insurgency plan was in place before the regime fell, although some (including Saddam Hussein) have claimed as much.³⁹⁶ It is clear, however, that actions taken by the Ba'ath leadership before the regime fell abetted the insurgency's initial success: hidden money and weapons stocks, as well as tribal contacts, were exploited to great effect in the months following the fall of Baghdad. Money and ammunition were so easily accessible, in fact, that former regime elements funneled both to insurgent groups they did not themselves direct. Equally problematic, Iraq (especially Baghdad) was littered munitions dumps and weapons caches which Coalition troops took disastrously inadequate measures to secure (in part from a shortage of soldiers). The Ba'ath party, meanwhile, had squirreled away billions (US\$600 million in cash was discovered in a shed on Uday Hussein's property).³⁹⁷ The quiet that prevailed immediately after the fall of Baghdad reflected not the absence of opposition to the Coalition, but the period during which remnants of that regime were organizing their opposition.

Somewhat perversely, the Coalition's quick and decisive victory contributed to the strength of the early insurgency. U.S. military might was so overwhelming that entire Iraqi divisions simply capitulated, laying down their arms and going home. This is precisely what the shock and awe decapitation strategy intended. There was no war of attrition, no need to demolish the Iraqi army in order to overthrow the regime. The

³⁹⁶ International Crisis Group, "In their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency," 15 February, 2006, 5; 60 Minutes, *Saddam's Confessions*.

³⁹⁷ Peter Galbraith, *End of Iraq*, 179.

consequence: Coalition forces did not have to kill or capture and imprison a large proportion of the soldiers they met on the battlefield. That fact, taken together with CPA orders that disbanded the military and alienated Sunnis who were disproportionately reliant on Iraq's security apparatus for the livelihood, left many of them to fight another day, another way, while at the same time creating an incentive for them to do so. Indeed, Bremer's aggressive de-Ba'athification policy and the haphazard disbanding of the Iraqi military cost 500,000 Iraqis their livelihoods, humiliating them at the same time. Counting their families, nearly 2.5 million Iraqis were affected. Though salaries and stipends were announced more than a month later for many of these men (late payments remained an issue long afterward) the affected Sunnis—men who were once first in line for well-paying and honorable positions in the army and intelligence services—had at a stroke been deprived of all hope for any such employment or position in the new Iraq.

Although the de-Ba'athification of Iraq was never meant to be, or appear to be, de-Sunnification, that is precisely how it was perceived by many Sunnis. Under Saddam Hussein, 20% of the population had monopolized wealth and opportunity. Ba'athists were respected and envied by Sunnis, feared by the Kurds and Shiite. In Iraq, there was no better path to fortune and success than to become a member of the Ba'ath party. They had hope for their futures the majority of Iraqis could not share. And so it is among this segment of the population that one finds the strongest expressions of patriotism. Throughout the Sunni triangle, virtually everybody knew somebody connected to the Ba'ath party elite. Most wanted *to be* a part of it and were proud of any connections to Saddamists they had. Empowered Sunnis loved their country; many were exceedingly

proud to serve it. It must, of course, be noted that for them Iraq was a Sunni-Arab state, their love for country an extension of their position in the regime they dominated. Their opposition to the Coalition was therefore imbued by the passion and energy love of country can inspire when the way of life it represents comes under attack.

(Unsurprisingly, the communities they had ruled by the Ba'ath did not share the Sunnis' passion for Iraq).

Nor was it simply the Sunnis who had worked for Saddam at the highest levels of government (and those who depended on them) who were affected by regime change. The psychological effect on a self-consciously close-knit community ran much deeper. As army historians note, "one unifier among traditional Sunni Muslims and Baathist or non-Baathist secular Sunni Arabs was the privileged status they enjoyed..."³⁹⁸ For this segment of the population, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein replaced pride and hope with fear and uncertainty. Disbanding the military and security apparatus, along with aggressive de-Ba'athification that proscribed Sunnis who had succeeded in the former regime from rising in the next, made it seem they had no stake in the new regime. That the de-Ba'athification of Iraq was led by Ahmed Chalabi, a prominent Shiite expatriate with long-standing connections to American policymakers, only served to confirm the fears of many Sunnis.

Worse even than the loss of livelihood, honor, and hope of future advancement for these men was the specter of ceding their position to the faction they had so long so brutally suppressed. The Sunnis were cognizant from the moment the regime fell that the new

³⁹⁸ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 105.

regime was sure to empower a sect many of them believed to be beneath them, and had therefore treated terribly for decades. Amatzia Baram, a trusted Iraq expert who has testified before Congress and advised senior policy makers, emphasizes the importance of understanding the profound transformation in worldview regime change was poised to effect. For it would reverberate well beyond those who were directly affected by de-Ba'athification policies; insofar as the position within society of a cohesive group was being upended at a stroke—privileged status ceding to uncertainty and fear—virtually all Sunnis shared in the humiliation and fears of the formerly privileged Ba'athists. Understanding the impact of the war on the group that would provide so many insurgents, and among whom they found support for their brand of guerilla warfare, is important if one is to understand the insurgency.

His example of a typical Sunni affected by the decisions, Isma'il Muhammad Juwara, was not a high ranking Ba'athist. At the time Saddam Hussein's regime was overthrown, he was a midlevel official in Iraq's security service. As Baram explains, his life was utterly transformed.

After the fall of the Baath regime, he was sacked and his organization was taken apart. He was offered no other means of existence except for simple rations and tried to make ends meet by selling gasoline on the black market. Further, those who had once feared him now treated him with disdain. A clerk at one bank where he held an account called him a “dog” when he went to withdraw funds and told him he should go to Saddam to ask for his money. However, his newfound misfortune was confounded by his inability to understand how being a Ba'thi, something of which he had been extremely proud since he was a young man, had become “some sort of disease.” He began to ask himself: “Was serving the country some sort of crime? . . . We were on top of the system. We had dreams. . . . Now we are the losers. We lost our positions, our status, the [economic] security of our families, stability. Curse on the Americans. Curse on them.” Worse still, in

his mind, were the Shiite: “These people with turbans are going to run the country. What do they know? Iraq needs people like us.”³⁹⁹

It was not properly appreciated pre-invasion that Sunnis as a group would view regime change as a more or less zero-sum upending of the prevailing order: their loss would be proportionate to an enemy’s gain. Nor was the impact of regime change merely psychological. The Sunni Arab part of Iraq contains hundreds of tribes and sub-tribes, many of them organized into larger tribal federations (between 20 and 30 of these are thought to have more than 100,000 descendants). While the precise number of Sunnis who self-consciously identify with a tribal unit is unknown, those claiming tribal affiliations make up an important part of the population; no doubt, the count runs into the millions. And while Iraq is a predominantly urban country, many city-dwelling Sunnis nonetheless continue to espouse “cultural tribal values”: in addition to the expression of this pre-modern political allegiance, the demonstration of courage in battle is still regarded as an important point of honor, it is not unusual for tribesman to avenge blood relatives, and the practice of marrying first and second cousins remains common.⁴⁰⁰ In fact, nearly half of all marriages in Baghdad are between cousins according to the *New York Times*.⁴⁰¹

Under Saddam Hussein’s regime, the army and security apparatus recruited enthusiastically from these tribes largely because Sunnis with tribal connections proved

³⁹⁹ Amatzia Baram, “Who Are the Insurgents,” *United States Institute For Peace*, April 2005. <http://www.usip.org/files/resources/sr134.pdf>

⁴⁰⁰ *Council on Foreign Relations*, “Iraq: The Role of Tribes.” <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/iraq-role-tribes/p7681>

⁴⁰¹ John Tierney, “The Struggle For Iraq: Traditions,” *New York Times*, 28 September, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/28/world/struggle-for-iraq-traditions-iraqi-family-ties-complicate-american-efforts-for.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

generally to be fiercely loyal and adept as soldiers. The advantages enjoyed by Sunni tribes went well beyond this however. The entire region owed much of its economic well-being to its privileged relationship with the Ba'athists in other respects as well. Saddam Hussein tolerated, in some cases encouraged, large-scale trans-border smuggling operations; some tribes received payments for their loyalty, which was also an incentive for continued obedience; many tribes even supplied border guards to the regime.⁴⁰² Virtually all of these privileges ended when the regime was overthrown. In fact, the CPA and later Iraq's provisional government and its elected government took steps to curb trans-border smuggling. This, too, had a disproportionate affect on Sunni Iraqis and added to the fear that the new Iraq would be dominated by Shiites to their detriment. Not unreasonably, Sunnis as a group—not just those who had committed crimes or benefitted from Saddam Hussein's reign—believed their very way of life to be at risk. Tightly knit tribes and communities feared losing the privileges and independence they enjoyed; their leaders feared losing their positions.

Furthermore, that Coalition troops were put in the position of fighting a nascent insurgency in an environment in which traditional points of honor and offense still dominate made their task next to impossible. Ordinary (indeed necessary) security measures—the use of dogs in Iraqis homes, searches of persons (including women), commonplace manners of restraining suspects—all transgressed long-established cultural *mores*. If Coalition methods did not quite create insurgents, they certainly offended a population already distressed by the transformation regime change was exerting. In some

⁴⁰² Amatzia Baram, "Who are the Insurgents", 6.

cases, Coalition strikes against known insurgents made them new enemies as families and tribes transferred their allegiance to avenge the honor of those who had been killed. This is one of the main reasons that a relatively small number of active insurgents (most put the figure in the thousands) was able to do so much damage so enduringly. A year after the worst of the insurgency had been contained, support for insurgents remained high.⁴⁰³

In other words, Sunnis were willing to fight the Coalition (and support those carrying out the violence) for a number of reasons: some just needed a paycheck, some fought to retain Sunni dominion in Iraq, some feared the ascent of Shiite majority, some fought to retain local authority or autonomy, some fought to restore their personal, tribal, or sectarian honor; many fought from a combination of motives. The first year of the Insurgency (Phase I) was dominated by the competition between small and localized groups, fighting for a constellation of related and sometimes opposing reasons, to gain exposure and the means to expand their operations and influence.⁴⁰⁴ Insurgents successfully leveraged their connections—party, family, tribal, geographic, religious—which in a society organized largely along traditional conceptions of honor provided a very supportive environment for the burgeoning insurgency.

While this first group of insurgents was not motivated to oppose the Coalition by radical Islamic ideals, but rather by self-interested calculation, they increasingly took on an Islamic identity, or at very least, the leaders who would prove successful utilized religious arguments to give the insurgency cohesion and enthusiasm. Ali Allawi points out that

⁴⁰³ *Economist*, “Is it Really Coming Right?” 27 November, 2008.

⁴⁰⁴ *International Crisis Group*, “In Their Own Words,” 7.

while what remained of the Ba'ath party was “too unpopular and its ideology too full of holes” to mount a sustained and popular challenge to the new regime, it did provide the starting point—the people, the networks and organization, the material resources, to get the insurgency off to a start.⁴⁰⁵ While American planners expressed optimism that stemming the insurgency would be a simple matter of tracking down a few dozen top officials—the deck of cards unfortunately likened it to a game—the insurgents themselves were going out of their way to make it clear they stood for something much grander. Near the end of 2003, one group appeared on Al-Jazeera television to make this point:

We, your brothers in the resistance, announce to the world at large that we will resist. We will resist the occupier to defend our religion, creed, homeland, and people.

We would like to draw your attention to an important fact. This spreading resistance, which is growing bigger and bigger in an uninterrupted manner, has absolutely no links with the so-called remnants of the former regime. The former regime and its Ba'athist agents lack the courage to sacrifice their blood, funds, spouses, and sons. Had they been so, they would not have surrendered Baghdad so easily...

This land is ours and the occupier is an enemy to God and Muslims... Our religion orders us to pursue jihad.⁴⁰⁶

Islamic *jihadists* had, by this point, largely wrested control of the insurgency. Thus, mid-2004 to Mid-2005, or Phase II of the Insurgency, saw the consolidation and centralization of insurgent groups under an Islamist banner. The leadership and texture of the insurgency had evolved: radical Islamists rose to prominence, and by framing their struggle as a religiously mandated war against foreign infidel conquerors, the insurgency gained a new unity and ferocity. The insurgents' arguments were not constrained to the

⁴⁰⁵ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 178-182.

⁴⁰⁶ Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 89.

battlefield however. Iraqi society had been radicalizing quietly for some time. Army historians cite a cleric in Mosul as representative of a sentiment startlingly common among insurgents and their supporters: “In invading a Muslim territory, the objective of the infidels has always been to destroy the cultural values of Islam... We have been delivered of the injustices of one man [i.e., Saddam Hussein] but this does not mean we must accept the American-British domination.”⁴⁰⁷

The Islamist Insurgents

The second group, extremist Islamists, though inspired by different and in a way much loftier ultimate purposes (the establishment of a Taliban-style Islamic government devoted to the instantiation of *sharia* law), their aim in practice was much the same: to prevent the establishment of a stable and democratic, Shiite-dominated, Iraqi state. While the most radical among them call for the reestablishment of an Islamic Caliphate, this is not an end goal that was emphasized by the major insurgent groups in their propaganda campaigns, probably for tactical reasons.⁴⁰⁸ They were, however, united by the belief that it is a religious duty to confront infidels wherever they can, by whatever means. For homegrown Iraqi Islamists, the overthrow of the Ba’athist regime marked an opportunity (for some, *the duty*) to come out from underground in order to participate in that struggle. Many observers were indeed shocked by the number of insurgents (and the extent of their devotion) who now appear to have been part of a simmering group of

⁴⁰⁷ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 100.

⁴⁰⁸ International Crisis Group, “In their own Words,” 18.

extremist Iraqis hitherto driven underground by Ba’athist censorship and repression. Ali A. Allawi conveys his surprise at what the world quickly perceived in Iraq, finally freed from modes of repression: “It was in post-Saddam Iraq... that I could see how far into Islamic political and social life the crisis [of Islamic Civilization] had seeped. The murderous violence unleashed by radical Wahhabi-inspired Islamists was accompanied by laborious jurisprudential ‘justifications.’”⁴⁰⁹

For this faction, as well as for the foreign fighters who flowed into the country, mostly through Syria but from a wide variety of countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa, Iraq was one battleground among many (if ultimately the most important one). They were not fighting as Iraqis, nor even as Sunni Iraqis, but as Muslims against infidel Americans and apostate Shiite. They cast their struggle in the broadest possible terms, situating their actions in the context of a centuries-long conflict between civilizations: they invoke the Crusades, the battle of Hittin, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, etc.⁴¹⁰ They were fighting as Holy Warriors, claiming a divine mandate to protect a way of life under siege by infidels.

One of the most glaring pre-war misperceptions about Iraq—one that persisted through the first year of the insurgency⁴¹¹—was that Iraq was a mainly secular country, that for this reason it was particularly well-suited to democratization. No doubt, the Ba’ath party had secular, Arab nationalist, roots. But the Islamic Resurgence that began to affect the

⁴⁰⁹ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), xii.

⁴¹⁰ *International Crisis Group*, “In their own Words”, 10

⁴¹¹ According to Army historians, as late as mid-2004, Coalition leaders including General Casey continued to underestimate the insurgency, believing it to be made up primarily (and directed by) “former regime elements.” Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 105.

politics of the Middle East in the 1970s had also exerted a profound effect of the social character of Iraq—its Sunni and Shiite populations alike. According to *Hay'at al-'Ulama al-Muslimi* (the Muslim Ulema Council in Iraq, an association of Iraq's Sunni scholars of Islam established five days after Saddam Hussein's fall which has since become a powerful counterpoise to Iraq's Shiite religious hierarchy based in Najaf),⁴¹² the Sunnis of Iraq have been radicalizing for some time. 'Ayyash al-Kubaysi, spokesperson for the council, explained that during the decade of U.N. sanctions against Iraq, a generation of young men “were reared in the mosque... the mosque embraced them.”⁴¹³

Whether there were actually organized clandestine Islamist organizations of any real political significance pre-invasion remains a matter of some dispute.⁴¹⁴ Ali Allawi notes that from 1993 onward, the Iraqi Islamic Party, infused by the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, was newly tolerated “as it tried to reconstitute its base in a semi-clandestine way.”⁴¹⁵ It went on to become perhaps the most important political force on the Sunni side in post-Saddam Iraq, its power base located in Anbar Province, and manifest in local and national elections. Others assert that Islamist organizations were pushed underground in Iraq, but continued to exist and organize actively in spite of state repression.⁴¹⁶ However active politicized Islamists remained on the Sunni side, two

⁴¹² Roel Meijer, “The Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq,” *Middle East Research and Information Project*. <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer237/association-muslim-scholars-iraq>

⁴¹³ Quoted in Amatzia Baram, “Who are the Insurgents?” 9.

⁴¹⁴ Amatzia Baram, “Who are the Insurgents?” 10.

⁴¹⁵ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 56.

⁴¹⁶ Edward Wong, “The Struggle for Iraq; Iraqi Factions; Once-Ruling Sunnis Unite To Regain a Piece of the Pie” *The New York Times*, 12 January, 2004. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/12/world/struggle-for-iraq-iraqi-factions-once-ruling-sunnis-unite-regain-piece-pie.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

things are undeniable. Key mosques and their communities *were* radicalizing, and Saddam Hussein's attempt to co-opt the Islamization of Iraq had the unintended effect of further exacerbating that radicalization.

As Baram observes, "The mosques were the only institution, apart from the tribes, relatively immune to regime and party control. They became the natural place for people in search of an alternative to the Ba'ath to pass their free time."⁴¹⁷ The result: much as opposition to Nasser's modernizing reforms in Egypt a half-century ago had taken refuge in the mosque, and as Somalia's present radicalization grew out of its mosques, so were Iraq's most radical elements congregating in the one place beyond the reach of the country's tyrant. Saddam Hussein had always been harder on the Shi'ite religious hierarchy—prohibiting certain forms of observance, censoring literature from Iran, assassinating popular leaders who amassed sufficient following to threaten his regime. Sunni clerics were allowed much more freedom (even if the Ba'athist regime tamed those who crossed the line by interrogating or imprisoning them for short periods).⁴¹⁸ Censorship accompanied by brutal force can prevent opinions pernicious to the state from manifesting in deed. But as Rousseau points out, censorship cannot erase the opinions from men's minds. More often, to forbid something increases its appeal; by highlighting the subversive power of a set of ideas, one draws a dangerous type of man to

⁴¹⁷ Edward Wong, "The Struggle for Iraq."

⁴¹⁸ Amatzia Baram, "Who are the Insurgents?" 10.

embrace them: young, energetic, honor-loving men, precisely the type willing to sacrifice everything for a cause bigger than he is.⁴¹⁹

Saddam Hussein's defeat after his invasion of Kuwait had a number of transformative effects on Iraqi society that contributed to this underground radicalization. First, much as Egypt's humiliating defeat in 1967 had been a death knell for the country's pro-Western liberal nationalists, prompting Egypt's reconciliation with the Middle East's more conservative states, so did the West's easy and utter demolishing of Saddam Hussein's military apparatus further strengthened its anti-secular currents. Second, the militaristic Ba'ath—a party that had long ceased to hold itself up to its ideological foundations—was even more obviously discredited by military defeat. The possibility of uniting the Arab world under Iraq's flag seemed dashed by a new world order apparently intent to preserve sovereign boundaries with overwhelming military force, Ba'ath party ideas no longer inspired its youngest members, nor promised to serve as a useful recruitment tool. The party itself was at risk of disintegrating if it could not reinvent itself. Realizing both these things, Saddam Hussein turned to the most powerful ideational pillar still in tact in the country, hoping that an outward (if halfhearted) embrace of Islam could co-opt its potentially destabilizing moral authority to legitimate his rule.

Thus, as Baram argues, it was his sense that a “new zeitgeist was filling the horizon—Islam” that led Saddam Hussein to initiate Iraq's Faith Campaign. While most date its beginning to 1993 or 1994, Arabic script, *Allaahu Akbar* or “God is Great”, had been added to Iraq's flag in 1991 in an attempt to rally sympathy in the Arab world to his

⁴¹⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letter to d'Alembert*.

cause and motivate the religious among his soldiers to fight for country. In the years that followed, new emphasis was placed on the Islamic identity of the country in the (state controlled) media. Sermons and Qur'anic recitations were broadcast over the radio and television. The Saddam University of Religious Studies was opened, and new resources devoted to the training of preachers and religious studies teachers. The regime provided funding for mandatory Quran classes in Iraq's schools and government offices. Sunni preachers were permitted more generous freedom of expression. New mosques were built with public funds, the largest in the world planned for Baghdad. Women were encouraged to wear the *hijab*. The consumption of alcohol in public was banned. *Sharia*-inspired punishments began to be employed throughout the country.⁴²⁰ And Saddam Hussein embarked on the megalomaniac undertaking of having a copy of the Qur'an produced by hand using his blood as ink.

The most perceptive commentator on modern Iraq, Ali Allawi, concurs with Baram's assessment that Iraq's zeitgeist was undergoing a transformation in the decade leading up to invasion. But as he explains, Iraqis' religiosity could not so easily be co-opted for political purposes:

The effects of the 'faith campaign' were profound and far-reaching. The regime now actively sought to infuse religious sentiments into its population and these became an anchor stone of the new, religiously conscious Ba'ath... But the Sunni world itself had changed. Moderate Sunnism had been ceding ground to radical Islam everywhere, and this situation had been unwittingly imported into Iraq by a hitherto aggressive secular regime. This had an unintended radicalizing effect on society, and encouraged the growth of *salafi* (ultra orthodox) currents in the Sunni community. The regime attempted, somewhat haphazardly and with

⁴²⁰ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 56; Amatzia Baram, "Who are the Insurgents?" 10.

indifferent results, to control the radical Sunni preachers, but to little avail. They became firmly established in key mosques throughout the country... The seeds of Sunni Islamic radicalism, laid during the 'faith campaign', were hard to remove.⁴²¹

It was during this time that radical clerics captured important mosques throughout the country—these constituted pulpits from which to disseminate radical ideas during the decade leading up to Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the bases from which insurgents would later organize their campaign against it. Commentators agree that the ultra-radical Wahhabi-Salafi strain of Islam gained especially in Iraq during this period. While there are differences between the camps, what they have in common is more important for our purposes. The Salafis (who emulate the practices of the Prophet Muhammad himself, as well as the generations of the four subsequent rightly guided Caliphs), and the Wahhabis (literalists too, distinguished by their close adherence to the teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd' Al-Wahhab) both deny the legitimacy of virtually every state in the Middle East—they have transgressed too far against Islam at the behest of Western powers and ideas, they are dominated by force instead of Islamic law, or by apostate Shiite—and must therefore be destroyed and replaced by regimes organized according to *sharia* properly understood. The term *jihad* as it is typically used today refers to this struggle: war for the sake of expelling unbelievers and usurpers from Muslim lands with the aim of instantiating government according to Islamic law. These ideas drive the most radical Sunni Islamists and the ones willing to become warriors—and martyrs—in service to that cause.

⁴²¹ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 56-57.

Precisely because the regime in Iraq—though illegitimate to be sure—was so durably cosseted by Saddam’s security apparatus, the behavior of the ultra-radicals took a different, much less perceptible, form. For Iraqi radicals had also been heavily influenced by the teachings of a prominent Iraqi member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammad Ahmad al-Rashid, during the decade leading up to the regime overthrow. Officially censored, he still managed a profound influence, his works smuggled into the country from Egypt and Jordan. He did not dispute the Salafi/Wahhabi claim that governments throughout the Islamic world were illegitimate, that they should be overthrown and that those guilty of apostasy, killed. Nor did he argue against jihad for the sake of instantiating a more literal species of Islam. He does, however, advocate caution and patience.

Much as Muslim Brothers have, in recent decades, become supporters of popular elections as a means to gain political power—whereby to enact a decidedly illiberal agenda—so does al-Rashid inveigh upon believers where the state is strong to prepare their societies for Islamic law by proselytizing peacefully until the moment to resist appears more auspicious. As Baram helpfully summarizes al-Rashid’s thought, “jihad warriors should be rational and calculating”; where open *jihad* against oppressive states cannot succeed, believers can help to prepare the way for future success by working to “expand the ranks of true Muslims and deepen their Islamic education and conviction.”⁴²² In essence, al-Rashid helped to persuade ultra-radicals that they could be committed Islamic warriors while remaining politically inactive. Iraq’s Salafis and Wahhabis were no less radical in their opinions and ideals; they were, however,

⁴²² Amatzia Baram, “Who are the Insurgents?” 11.

persuaded to spend their energy spreading them quietly as opposed to organizing a violent jihad against the Ba'athist regime. Driven underground in Hussein's Iraq (as indeed all opposition was) their significance was underestimated by orders of magnitude.

Allawi concurs that the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood “became particularly important” in the decade preceding the invasion of Iraq, and further emphasizes their significance post-invasion:

Iraq under Saddam had been just such a state [in which radicalism was driven underground]. It was inadvisable and dangerous for the Islamists to confront the state directly there, but Iraq was fertile ground for the special brand of proselytizing that [al-Rashid] advocated, a watered-down version of Salafism, in line with the Brotherhood's own brand of politics... this allowed Sunni Arab Islamists simultaneously to take advantage of the opening offered by Saddam's 'Faith Campaign' while laying the foundations for a more direct challenge to the state. To Islamist Sunni political activism remained imperceptible during the 1990s but would break out into the open after the fall of the regime.

The Coalition was unprepared for the emergence of Islamism as an important force in Iraq's Sunni Arab community. The indifference to politics that marked the posture of Islamists during the 1990s changed perceptibly after the fall of the Ba'ath regime. *Jihad*, in the sense of armed struggle against a 'pagan' order, was now obligatory, and the fact that this order was linked to foreign occupiers made it doubly so. When Islamist political and social activity broke out in earnest in Mosul, just after the fall of the regime, Coalition officials put it down to the sudden freedoms that the population now enjoyed. It was claimed to be a passing fancy that would disappear when jobs, democracy and security were provided. One Coalition official stated that 'there is a certain amount of novelty to this... This will disappear over time.'⁴²³

It did disappear. Instead, Salafi preachers became a vitally important support for the insurgency—spreading Jihadist literature and anti-Coalition propaganda, serving as an organizational focal point for insurgents, and even offering their mosques as secure hiding places for insurgents' weapons and bombs.

⁴²³ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 246.

Foreign Islamists no doubt played an important role in the insurgency, especially as it reached its destructive zenith. A Jordanian, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, founded the group responsible for many of the most spectacular attacks in Iraq, *al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad), which later became *Tandhim al-Qa'ida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* (al-Qaeda's Organization in Mesopotamia or Iraq). Indeed, the majority of the most daring and gruesome acts of terrorism—suicide bombings and beheadings—were committed by foreign nationals.⁴²⁴ And yet, it is believed that at the height of the insurgency, even *al-Qaeda in Iraq* claimed at least ten Iraqi members for every foreign fighter.⁴²⁵ Military and expert analysis reach consensus on this point: the Islamist wing of the insurgency was predominantly made up of Iraqis, not foreign nationals. In late September of 2004, General Abizaid estimated that the number of foreign fighters in Iraq was below 1,000.⁴²⁶ Around the same time, *USA Today* noted that only 90 of 5,700 detainees being held in Iraq were not Iraqi Nationals.⁴²⁷ On 14 July, 2006, as the insurgency entered its most destructive phase, Colonel Sean MacFarland noted in a Defense Department briefing that while foreign fighters were responsible for virtually all of the suicide bombings in

⁴²⁴ This is not altogether surprising, and should not be taken to indicate that Iraqi Islamists are generally less radical than foreign Islamists. Rather, the apparent incongruity is the expected result of a simple selection effect. Iraq drew a disproportionate number of the most radical “travelling jihadists” for the simple reason that *Al-Qaeda* believes it to be the central front in the war against the West. Their radicalism explains *both* their enthusiasm to seek out conflict abroad, and their willingness to self-detonate. While the available data of their countries of origin is, unsurprisingly, far from comprehensive, it seems the majority hail from the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa. The information available suggests the breakdown looks something like this: Saudi Arabia (41%), Libya (19%), Syria (8%), Yemen (8%), Algeria (7%), Morocco (6%), Tunisia (5%), Jordan (2%), Egypt (1%). (Brookings Institute, “Iraq Index,” 20 November 2008, 24).

⁴²⁵ International Crisis Group, “In their own Words,” 1, 12.

⁴²⁶ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 110.

⁴²⁷ “Foreign Detainees are Few in Iraq,” *USA Today*, July 6, 2004.

Iraq⁴²⁸ they were nonetheless “very few in number.”⁴²⁹ According to expert analysts at the Brookings Institute, the number of foreign fighters is not believed to have exceeded 1,000 until August of 2005, reaching a peak of not more than 2,000 at the end of 2007.⁴³⁰

In other words, the Islamic Resurgence in Iraq provided a good deal of the impetus, and most of the fuel, for the insurgency. The botched occupation of Iraq provided the opportunity, and implementation missteps, addition fuel for a situation that was already incendiary. A brief look at the names of the major insurgent groups reveals that most claim an explicit religious orientation. *Tandhim al-Qa’ida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* (al-Qaeda’s Organization in Mesopotamia) was formerly known as *al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad). The most active insurgent group in Kurdistan is known as *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* (Partisans of the Sunna Army); *al-Sunna* refers to the Prophet’s deeds and sayings. Other important groups include *Al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-’Iraq* (the Islamic Army in Iraq), *Al-Jabha al-Islamiya lil-Muqawama al-’Iraqiya* (the Islamic Front of the Iraqi Resistance), *Jaysh al-Rashidin* (the First Four Caliphs Army), *Jaysh al-Mujahidin* (the Mujahidin’s Army), *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya fil-’Iraq* (the Islamic Resistance’s Movement in Iraq), *Jaysh Muhammad* (Muhammad’s Army), and *Saraya Al-Ghadhab Al-Islami* (the Islamic Anger Brigades). That many of the organizations state their connection to Iraq specifically further attests to the insurgency’s domestic bent.

Equally troubling, perhaps, insurgents were eager to legitimize their jihad, and turned to

⁴²⁸ Brookings Institute, “Iraq Index,” 20 November 2008, 24, 64.

⁴²⁹ Brookings Institute, “Iraq Index,” 20 November, 2008, 24.

⁴³⁰ Brookings Institute, “Iraq Index,” 20 November, 2008, 24.

prominent religious scholars to shore up support for their resistance. Respected elements of Saudi Arabia's non-establishment *Al-Sahwa ulema*, and later, Iraq's progressively more radical Association of Muslim Scholars, have both supported the *jihad* on theological grounds. The leaders of the former group, perhaps the most respected faction of scholars in Saudi Arabia and increasingly radical since the established *ulema* acquiesced to a U.S. presence in the kingdom during and after Desert Storm, signed an open letter to the Iraqi people urging them to join a defensive jihad against the Coalition occupiers on 5 November of 2004—"jihad against the occupation was mandatory for all those who were able"—going so far as to issue a *fatwa* prohibiting Iraqis from harming *jihadists* or assisting Coalition troops carrying out anti-insurgent raids.⁴³¹ Commentators note that while the House of Saud has successfully compelled the non-establishment *ulema* to refrain from criticizing the regime itself (by way of censoring and imprisoning leading clerics), it has not shown the same enthusiasm to moderate their pronouncement regarding foreign affairs.⁴³² The Iraqi group, meanwhile, did demonstrate an initial reluctance to endorse, or even use the term, "*jihad*"; it ultimately adopted "a discourse that resembles that of the jihadi salafis," however, in the end asserting that "the call to Islam is the call to jihad, because jihad is Islam," and that jihad is a "duty of the times."⁴³³ In other words, resistance to the Coalition was both Iraqi and increasingly Islamist, contrary to the

⁴³¹ Shmuel Bachar et al, "Establishment Ulama and Radicalism in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan," *Center on Islam, Democracy, and the Future of the Muslim World*, 17-20. http://www.currenttrends.org/docLib/20061226_UlamaandRadicalismfinal.pdf. cf. International Crisis Group, "Who are the Islamists?", 1-4; and Toby Craig Jones, *Strategic Insights*, "The Clerics, the Sahwa and the Saudi State," 5.

⁴³² Shmuel Bachar et al, "Establishment Ulama...", 19; Toby Craig Jones, "The Clerics, the Sahwa and the Saudi State," 5.

⁴³³ International Crisis Group, "In their own Words, 10. cf. Roel Meijer, "The Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq."

expectations of war planners and their strategic assessments through the first year of conflict.

In fact, convinced that the insurgency was being organized by former regime elements, Coalition planners were hopeful in December of 2003 that the capture of Saddam Hussein would help stem the violence—not necessarily because he was believed to be directing the insurgency, but because his capture (along with other prominent Ba’athists) would send a powerful signal to Iraqis that Iraq’s tyrant was not coming back. As Ahmed S. Hashim explains in his book on the insurgency, “it is clear that for many former regime elements he constituted a symbol of resistance to foreign occupation. It was important that he was free, even if he was not in direct control of the insurgency.”⁴³⁴ The clear and indubitable end of the Ba’ath tyranny in Iraq was supposed to undermine an insurgency many still believed was motivated by a desire to reestablish it.

That, however, is not at all how the story unfolded. The gulf between the expected effect of Saddam Hussein’s capture, and its effect in fact, was revealed in the first half of 2004. After a short lull, the insurgency intensified dramatically, attacks almost tripling in number by the summer, and the number insurgents quadrupling according to some estimates.⁴³⁵ The capture of Saddam Hussein had the unexpected effect of strengthening the insurgency by, so to speak, purifying its objectives in the minds of Iraqis disposed to support a resistance justified on Islamist lines. The taint of the Ba’ath party and its

⁴³⁴ Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 88.

⁴³⁵ Brookings Institute, “Iraq Index”, 20 November, 2008, 5; 19 January, 2005, 12.

objectives disintegrating, recruitment soared and a new unity of purpose coalesced around the insurgency's most radical elements.

Army historians agree with the International Conflict Group's 2006 assessment of the ultimate impact of Saddam Hussein's capture.⁴³⁶ By clearly dissociating the insurgency from the any possibility of the restoration of a despised regime, Saddam Hussein's capture gave new momentum to the insurgents' emerging cause by "shoring up its... religious/jihadist credentials." The indisputable end of the Ba'ath—accomplished at great effort by Coalition troops as they combed the country for high-ranking officials of the former regime—had the simultaneous effect of facilitating "a rapprochement between the insurgency and transnational jihadi networks," groups that were, in principle, as opposed to Ba'athist ideology as to the presence of U.S. troops on Muslim soil.⁴³⁷

From mid-2004 through approximately the autumn of 2006, the insurgency was effectively led by Zarqawi's group. He had linked his nascent insurgent group to Bin-Laden's worldwide network by October of 2004. In January of 2006, he expanded *Al-Qaeda in Iraq* into an umbrella-like operation called *Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin* (Shura Council of Mujahidin), which sought to unify all the major insurgent groups under his control, or at least coordinate their operations.⁴³⁸ As a result, the insurgency established and maintained a remarkable degree of cohesion as it approached its destructive zenith.

⁴³⁶ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 102

⁴³⁷ International Crisis Group, "Who are the Insurgents?" 9.

⁴³⁸ Nibras Kazimi, "The Caliphate Attempted," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* Vol. 7 (July 2008), 1-38.

On the face of it, this is a remarkable feat. We have said that the insurgency's strength to this point derived in large from the underestimated intensity of Islamist sentiment in Iraq. And yet, the majority of the Sunnis who supported the insurgency—and many of the insurgents, as we have seen—were hardly *jihadists* of the Salafi-Wahhabi school. Nonetheless, religious arguments had significant resonance given the increasing religiosity of the population; moreover, many opposed a foreign presence whose motivations they had come to distrust. Sunnis were disproportionately apprehensive about their futures, and living under circumstances that quite understandably drove many to reaffirm their faith. But they were not necessarily eager to endorse the radical Salafi end-game (certainly not as articulated by *Al-Qaeda in Iraq*): the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate governed according to a literal interpretation of *sharia* law. In fact, a widely cited 2006 *International Crisis Group* report argues that, for strategic reasons, the most important armed groups deliberately refrained from articulating a “political program” through the beginning of 2006:

[T]here has been neither elaborate vision of a future Islamic Republic nor extensive reference to restoring Sunni Arab rule, nor calls to revert to a pre-war status quo.

Instead, the insurgency principally has concentrated on the more operational, immediate aspects of the conflict. This was most evident during earlier phases, when insurgents believed U.S. forces would be present for an extensive period and thus conceived of their struggle as a long jihad.⁴³⁹

What held the two wings of the insurgency—the Islamists and the Sunnis who had

⁴³⁹ International Crisis Group, “Who are the Insurgents?” 15.

prospered under the Ba'athists—together then? The authors of the report contend that “the shared objective simply was to prevent the U.S. from stabilizing the situation,” even that “an untainted jihad transcending particular interests or ambitions”—one the various groups would be content to allow Zarqawi’s group to lead—was only possible so long as the Salafis refrained from articulating a “detailed political program.” Indeed, evidence suggests that an important preface to the Surge’s success was *Al-Qaeda*’s overreach in the latter part of 2006. They widened the rift between the first group of insurgents and the radical Salafi Islamists (thereby making it easier to exploit) by turning their focus from fighting Coalition troops to the establishment of a brutally Islamist state. As they began targeting Iraqis they deemed insufficiently Islamic, the barbaric tactics they were employing frightened moderate Sunnis, and the revelation of their end-game with the declaration of an Islamic state in Anbar province (what was to be the seat of the restored Caliphate), created the opportunity U.S. forces were able to parlay into significant security gains.

Beyond the initial reluctance to specify a political program, two further factors contributed to the insurgents’ unity through the middle of 2006: political developments (including Shiite domination of government and the constitutional convention that yielded a document prejudicial to Sunni interests) were viewed as a harbinger of a Shiite-dominated Iraq and served to rouse Sunnis to action; and Shiite Iraqis, under the auspices of Al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army and the Badr organization, began to retaliate in the face of Sunni provocation, making it easier to for insurgent leaders to encourage Sunnis

to escalate counter-retaliations in turn. In other words, the two strains of the insurgency were never united when it came to the radical Islamist end-game. But the first step toward their respective end-games—expelling American troops and preventing Shiite ascendancy—was something both strains could agree upon.

Insurgent Tactics

In the beginning, insurgents focused their attacks on the occupying power they railed against, targeting Coalition forces and the U.N. Quickly, they realized that to accomplish their aim of destabilizing Iraq it would be more effective (and much easier) to target Iraqi civilians: those working with the coalition as translators and drivers, those waiting outside recruiting offices, civilians shopping in markets, worshippers assembled to pray, wedding and funeral processions, Shiite Iraqis in particular. The insurgency would never be able to defeat American forces militarily; this, they knew. But by revealing to non-insurgents that working with the Coalition was a death sentence, they realized most Iraqis could at least be made to cower, ultimately to surrender the fight. By taking away all hope that a stable and modern Iraq could be built—by targeting innocents working to that end, by committing spectacular attacks as enraging as they were murderous, all the while waging a sophisticate propaganda campaign—insurgents sought to turn Iraqis against one another and the Coalition, to catalyze a civil war along sectarian lines.⁴⁴⁰

⁴⁴⁰ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 112.

Insurgent leaders believed, moreover, that they had only to fight American troops to a stalemate to precipitate U.S. withdrawal, the first step toward their stated end game. They stood little chance of accomplishing this if they limited themselves to attacking U.S. troops; and indeed, wherever the forces were allowed to meet more or less openly, the insurgents (the Shiite Madhi Army too) were routed. And so insurgents targeted vulnerable groups that did not represent a threat to them. By inciting Iraqis who were not necessarily loyal to the aims of the insurgency to nonetheless react to insurgent provocations violently, the level of chaos in Iraq could be made to exceed what the insurgent groups were capable of fomenting by more limited methods. Thus, insurgents believed they could raise the expense of the war beyond the threshold the American public would accept. In his authoritative study of the insurgency, Ahmed Hashim suggests that “all the insurgent groups—whatever their ideological provenance—share with one another (and with the politically active Sunni political party/groups) the desire and determination to make the stay of the United States as painful as untenable as possible so that it leaves Iraq.”⁴⁴¹

Between the beginning of the war and destruction of the Askariya shrine at Samarra on 22 February 2006, dozens of attacks had killed fifty Shiite civilians or more at a stroke. Many of them were calculated to exert maximal symbolic effect, targeting prominent leaders, holy places, or disrupting religious celebrations. On 29 August, 2003, Ayatollah Bakr Al-Hakim, the leader of the largest Shiite political party, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), was killed along with 94 others outside Imam Ali

⁴⁴¹ Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 123-24.

mosque in Najaf. On 2 March, 2004, suicide bombers killed 180 Shiite pilgrims celebrating Ashura for the first time in decades in coordinated attacks in Karbala and Baghdad. On 19 December, 2004, car bombs struck Najaf and Karbala, Shiite Islam's holy cities, killing at least 67. On August 31, 2005, 965 Shiite pilgrims died when Sunni insurgents fired rockets near Kadhim's Shrine in Baghdad, which combined with rumors that a suicide bomber was among them, sparked a deadly panic on a crowded bridge.

While Zarqawi denied repeatedly that his group was targeting Shiite civilians specifically, he did claim responsibility for attacks directed against Shiite political parties and recruitment centers. International Crisis Group notes, moreover, that in one important audio address, he exhorts Sunnis to “a comprehensive war against the *Rawafidh* all over Iraq, wherever and whenever they are found.”⁴⁴² While the term in question is apparently of ambiguous literal significance, it is “increasingly used as a pejorative designation for all Shiites”; its use permitted Zarqawi to fan the flames of sectarian conflict while claiming to less radical insurgents of the more secular wing that he was not trying to ignite a civil war. In private letters, his denunciations of Shiites is utterly unrestrained.⁴⁴³

Shiite leaders demonstrated considerable fortitude (in the service of their interest in a stable Iraq to be sure), urging restraint in the face of brutal provocation. Until February

⁴⁴² International Crisis Group, “The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict,” 27 February, 2006, 14.

⁴⁴³ Gilles Keppel and Jean-Pierre Mileli eds., *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2010), 253-255.

of 2005, Sunni attacks were not inspiring counter-attacks in significant numbers.⁴⁴⁴ Change came from opportunity. The January 2005 election had elevated to power an alliance between the Kurdish list and the Shiite umbrella party called the United Iraqi Alliance, giving control of the interior ministry to SCIRI. Commando units under the control of the Badr organization, an offshoot of SCIRI, infiltrated the department and began to carry out midnight raids targeting Sunni neighborhoods.⁴⁴⁵ It quickly became clear that the raids were not always directed against suspected insurgents, but often, innocent civilians who happened to be Sunnis. The Mahdi Army, too—a group loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr, a young cleric who opposed working with the Coalition and amassed a powerful following among the Shiite urban poor—began targeting Sunni civilians in retaliation during this period.

Peter Galbraith is probably correct in his assessment that “Iraq’s deadliest terrorist attack killed no one.”⁴⁴⁶ The demolition of the Askariya shrine in Samarra on 22 February, 2006, marked yet another escalation of sectarian hatreds. Restraint proved impossible, and the following week, 184 Sunni mosques were vandalized or destroyed. Thousands of Sunnis were kidnapped and executed in the months that followed, many of them by Shiite Iraqis in uniform and on the national payroll, often while areas were under curfew. Sunni insurgents had finally succeeded in tipping the Shiite balance: violent extremists on both sides of the equation had become the dominant forces in Iraqi politics. The activity of Shiite death squads, as they came to be known and which continued to

⁴⁴⁴ International Crisis Group, “The Next Iraqi War?” 2.

⁴⁴⁵ International Crisis Group, “The Next Iraqi War?” 1.

⁴⁴⁶ Peter Galbraith, *The End of Iraq*, 1.

infiltrate and emerge from Iraq's new "national" police force and army, contributed dramatically to the intensification of the violence as tit-for-tat inter-sectarian attacks continued to provoke still more vicious retaliation.

By this point, some were calling the spiraling Sunni-Shiite violence in Iraq a civil war. It is not hard to understand why. An important threshold had indeed been passed: innocent civilians were being targeted, kidnapped and killed, tortured and maimed, for no other reason than the manner in which they worshipped, the neighborhood they lived in, the clothes they wore, in some cases their names.⁴⁴⁷ At the time of the Samarra mosque bombing, an average week saw between 700 and 800 attacks against the Coalition and its Iraqi partners. From February of 2006 to the beginning of the Surge, that number increases spectacularly, to nearly 1600 attacks per week at its peak in June of 2007, a figure that does not capture the activity of Shiite death squads.⁴⁴⁸ Hundreds of thousands living in mixed Sunni-Shiite areas (as many as 90,000 per month during this period) were forced from their homes as neighborhoods homogenized, those in the minority leaving for fear of their lives. The U.S. death toll, meanwhile, was soaring. During this period, most months saw between 60 and 110 U.S. soldiers lose their lives.

Virtually every commentator now agrees that the depth of Islamist commitments, and what is a separate thing, the widespread sympathy in certain areas of the country for those advocating radical interpretations of Islam against the backdrop of the American occupation, were dramatically underestimated by war planners. Many expressed the

⁴⁴⁷ cf. Peter Galbraith, *The End of Iraq*.

⁴⁴⁸ Brookings Institute, "Iraq Index", 20 November, 2008, 6.

belief that Iraq was a particularly good candidate for liberal democracy precisely because it seemed to be a relatively secular state under Saddam Hussein's oppressive rule. We have said that planners failed to perceive how deeply the Resurgence of Islam had affected Iraq, especially over the decade following the first Gulf War. It would have been hard for any Westerner to imagine the terrible violence and intensity of hatred renewed religious commitment would provoke and feed. John Agresto acknowledges the mistake this way:

What we failed to realize was how even the more moderate and less fanatical versions of Islam still see their versions of sectarian truth as more important than general religious toleration, how natural the desire to impose orthodoxy by law on the heterodox is to most men, how resistant to philosophical modernity certain parts of the Islamic faith would be, and, at the extreme, how virulent, how savage, the response of the religious zealots and fanatics—who knew exactly what they were trying to accomplish in Iraq—would be.⁴⁴⁹

On the Shiite side

As the violence intensified, it became clear that Iraq's Shiite community was more cohesive, segments animated by a politicized species of Islam and virulent if long-suppressed anti-Sunni sentiments, than war planners anticipated. One reason for this: pervasive and long-standing Iranian influence. No friend of the Sunni-dominated secular Ba'ath regime, Iran's theocratic regime had been funding Shiite revolutionaries in Iraq since the Shah's overthrow in 1979. In fact, of Iraq's two dominant Shiite parties—which cooperatively constitute the single most powerful political force in post-Saddam

⁴⁴⁹ John Agresto, *Mugged by Reality*, 19.

Iraq—one, SCIRI, owes its existence to Iranian support, while the other, the Da'awa, though founded domestically in 1964, has at times relied on Tehran for safe-haven and funding.

Neither party has proven, at any point, committed to building a stable, united, and tolerant liberal democracy in Iraq. Before the invasion, SCIRI was unwilling to work with the American-supported Iraq Congress, an umbrella under which Iraq's moderate opposition groups organized (without tremendous success) to support Iraq's future government. Until the January 2009 election, SCIRI sought, from a position of strength, to leverage U.S. support in service of its own vision for Iraq. Shiite leaders have deftly manipulated the political process thanks, largely, to the cooperative relationship between the Najaf religious establishment led by Ayatollah Al-Sistani, and Iraq's Shiite political elite (too often a distinction without a difference). Together with Da'awa, SCIRI leads the Shiite umbrella party that has controlled the Iraqi government since 2005, the United Iraqi Alliance. Led by a prominent member of the party with more radical roots, Da'awa's Nouri Al-Maliki, the UIA has proven unabashedly eager to hasten America's departure from Iraq and therewith its influence over the Iraqi state, and has arguably done more to inflame Iraq's sectarian hatreds than to temper them. The militia attached to SCIRI, for instance, the Badr corps, captured the Ministry of the Interior in 2005 and proceeded to carry out attacks against the Sunni population after curfew and in government uniforms.

In terms of guiding ideology, both parties are deeply influenced by Ayatollah Khomeini's thought. Committed to the notion that absolute sovereignty belongs to God as opposed

to the people, they differ, most importantly, on the relative political authority they believe should be designated to the *umma* (the community of believers) and the ulema (the religious scholars based in Najaf). Both assert that legitimate laws can only be derived from the tenets of Islamic law; both insist on a prominent place for Shiite religious scholars; and, as we will see, members of both parties fought the inclusion of provisions in Iraq's constitution designed to protect the rights of individuals and minorities.

One of the greatest U.S. failures stems from precisely this: no one appreciated what Iraq's prominent Shiite leaders hoped to achieve, nor their broad base of popular support. That the leaders of Iraq's majority faction had a vision for Iraq utterly incompatible with the vision espoused by American policy makers is no doubt the root of a great many of Iraq's problems today. It is as though the key policymakers failed to ask themselves what should be among the most basic foreign policy calculus questions: how do the primary actors conceive of their interests; how will they act to achieve them? To make matters worse, the cohesion of the Islamist-leaning Shiite community in 2003, and the extent to which it would increase once their leaders were free to speak and organize openly post-Saddam, was also dramatically underestimated.

No doubt the insurgency has played a role in binding and radicalizing Iraqi Shiites. And while it is true Sunni-Shiite relations deteriorated manifestly in the years since the invasion began, the roots of this animosity run deeper. The post-Kuwait Shiite revolt in March of 1991, brutally put down by Saddam Hussein, as well as continual regime-sponsored assassinations of prominent Shiite clerics, helped to reinforce a sectarian consciousness in the decade leading up to the war. Prominent Shiite leaders have also

explained that many of their polarizing initiatives are the calculated result of a commitment to learn from mistakes further in the past. Many blamed the reluctance of Shiite leaders to make aggressive plays for power in the 1920s (in the face of British colonial rule) and the 1960s (in the face of the Ba'athist coup) for their community's almost century-long marginalization at the hands of the more assertive Sunni minority. The same leaders were determined to gain a larger share of the spoils this time around, a commitment to faction over country that was bound to complicate the construction of a new regime in Iraq.

Poorer Shiite, meanwhile, tended to gravitate toward Moqtada Al-Sadr, an intractable opponent of the U.S. occupation, and leader of the Mahdi Army, a civilian militia that would be responsible for some of the most brutal sectarian violence in Iraq. His vitriolic rhetoric, and atrocities committed by SCIRI's militia, the Badr Corps, were important contributors to Iraq's descent toward civil war. Brutal Sunni provocations were increasingly met with still more ferocious Shiite reactions; the cycle fed itself and violence escalated uncontrollably.

As Shiites coalesced around political leaders determined to exploit the community's religious convictions to sectarian political advantage, and to leverage that popular support toward the decentralization of Iraq and Islamization of its Shiite South, Sunnis continued to support (if uneasily) the increasingly radical, and increasingly brutal, Salafi-inspired insurgency. By mid-2006, U.S. forces had all but lost Anbar province. Mixed districts—Baghdad, its environs, Fallujah, and the areas in and south of the Sunni triangle—were descending into complete chaos, many neighborhoods controlled entirely by insurgents or

Shiite death squads. Iraq's political fate seemed likely to be determined by its most violent elements, a recipe for outright civil war and genocide.

In 2006 through the middle of 2007, it was hard not to conclude Iraq was lost. The assassination of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in June of 2006 hardly affected the number of insurgent attacks; the execution of Saddam Hussein in December only fanned fan sectarian flames. A steep upward trajectory marks virtually every measure of violence in Iraq available for this period. Commentators and politicians began to advocate partition. On 19 April, 2007, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid went so far as to declare "this war is lost" while prominent Democrats in Congress continued to advocate a rapid withdrawal, whatever the consequences for Iraqis and the U.S. national interest. In a word, when President Bush courageously announced that he was prepared to ignore mounting pressure to begin withdrawing troops, and in fact increase U.S. combat capacity in Iraq, Zarqawi had almost achieved his short-term objective of forcing American troops out of the country, even if he was not alive to appreciate it.

The Surge

Under the command of General Petraeus, the surge succeeded beyond the expectations of even its most committed proponents. In little more than a year, the security situation in Iraq was transformed spectacularly. Civilian and military casualties dropped to their lowest levels since the war began. With the calm, some semblance of normalcy has returned to the streets of Baghdad. Virtually every economic and quality of life indicator

indicates significant improvement. By the end of 2008, markets and even liquor stores had reopened; oil production soared as attacks on the country's energy infrastructure declined precipitously; electricity production finally came to exceed prewar levels; the number of telephone subscribers today approaches 15 million, up from 833,000 prewar (the number of internet subscriptions has jumped from 4,500 to 827,500); there are in Iraq today 45 commercial television stations, 114 commercial radio stations, and 268 independent newspapers and magazines (not a single independent media outlet operated under the Ba'ath regime); inflation, running at 5% in 2007, is running near levels deemed acceptable in the developed world.⁴⁵⁰

30,000 additional American troops are the root of this near-miraculous transformation; they made possible a new counter-insurgency strategy designed to separate the two wings of the insurgency, employing the first against the second. We have noted already that one of the biggest mistakes war planners made was to send an insufficient number troops. The mistake was in large the result of the failure to predict the mobilization, as well as quickly note the emergence in its early stages, of an organized insurgency. Almost nobody believed Iraq risked becoming an ungovernable, failed, state. The decision to send so few troops, combined with the unplanned disbanding and dissolution of Iraq's military and security forces, meant that the Coalition lacked the manpower it would have required to successfully combat an insurgency that benefitted from tremendous local support according to the classic counter-insurgency strategy: by *clearing* and then *holding* territory, what would permit them to help *rebuild* infrastructure and build the local

⁴⁵⁰ Brookings Institute, "Iraq Index," 20 November, 2008.

economy. The approach was, therefore, termed “Clear-Hold-Build.”

Commanders, who were not prepared for an insurgency and had not trained their units to fight one, noted early on that the insurgents’ strength as a resistance movement is derived from the support they receive—active (the contribution of resources) as well as passive (a reluctance to help counter-insurgency forces find insurgents and their weapons caches)—from the population. Given the number of troops available, and noting (as General Sanchez did early on) that an “iron-fisted approach to the conduct of operations was beginning to alienate Iraqis,” a light footprint strategy was adopted throughout the country.⁴⁵¹ In other words, the Coalition was not primarily committed to establishing security in Iraq pre-surge. Instead, they were operating under immense pressure to prepare a quick transfer of authority to Iraqis, on the assumption that U.S. withdrawal would dramatically improve the security situation.⁴⁵² Army historians note that many commanders devoted the bulk of their resources to reconstruction, governance and other types of noncombat missions, perceiving that gaining the trust and support of the local population was the key to victory, and that focusing on “aggressive combat operations that directly attacked insurgent networks... might alienate the population.”⁴⁵³

The problem: insufficient troop numbers made it impossible for the Coalition to gain widespread Sunni trust and support because they could not protect them over time.

(There were actually areas within shooting distance of Baghdad’s Green Zone that had

⁴⁵¹ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 122

⁴⁵² Sam Parker, “The New Nuri al-Maliki,” *Foreign Policy* Argument, 21 July, 2009.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/07/21/the_new_and_improved_nouri_al_maliki

⁴⁵³ Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II*, 122-125

gone without sustained Coalition presence from 2003 until the surge!) Well-trained Coalition troops were able to eliminate known enemies and begin reconstruction where they were deployed, but they could not hold their gains. No matter how valiant their efforts, in some areas everything fell apart when they left; and there was always a hot spot necessitating attention and so troops were continually being transferred to areas where conditions had deteriorated. Insurgents filled the vacuums, building explosive devices and organizing attacks against civilian and military targets nearby from the areas they were able to control. *Al-Qaeda in Iraq* systemically and deliberately moved in as the Coalition moved out of areas they had secured. By controlling swatches of terrain, especially on the outskirts of Baghdad, the insurgents could project their influence—and chaos—even into areas they did not control.

A diagram discovered in a Baghdad safe house in 2006, drawn it is believed by Zarqawi himself, revealed a rather sophisticated operational strategy: *AQI* sought to secure a series of belts around the city which permitted easy communication and the free movement of resources, and from which they launched attacks into Baghdad as well as outward, into neighboring provinces.⁴⁵⁴ Moreover, the Improvised Explosive Devices and Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices built in these areas were deployed along strategic roads, securing important transportation routes Westward to Fallujah, Ar Ramadi and into Syria, Southward toward Karbala, and Northward to Baqubah, Samarra, Tikrit, and

⁴⁵⁴ Eric Hamilton, “Development Fighting Al Qaeda in Iraq,” *Institute for the Study of War*, Backgrounder #21, 2.
<http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/reports/Devolpments%20Fighting%20Al%20Qaeda%20in%20Iraq.pdf>

Mosul.⁴⁵⁵

Most important of all, the fact that U.S. troops could not hold terrain reduced the incentive for Iraqis to cooperate with the Coalition; they were, understandably, afraid of the inevitable insurgent reprisals that would come when Coalition troops left, fears insurgents did everything in their power to stoke. The light footprint strategy developed to avoid offending Iraqis made it impossible to provide security in the face of an organized destabilizing force. The insurgents, meanwhile, sought to gain a monopoly on the means of violence—as well as vital resources like food, water, and fuel—wherever they could, thereby co-opting, or coercing, the support of the local population. Coupled with the existing incentives to support the insurgency heretofore discussed, U.S. troops were facing a near-impossible task.

The Surge effectively reversed the light footprint strategy in the areas insurgents were strongest. Increased troop presence permitted significant military operations to route *jihadi* strongholds; as important, it also permitted the establishment of more permanent outposts within those communities and then to help improve them. Troops stayed, made contacts, gathered intelligence, trained Iraqis to fight with them, and helped rebuild the infrastructure and economy that had been battered by and neglected under the *jihadi* reign. Significantly, the U.S. military made the “safety of the local population rather than force protection a priority.”⁴⁵⁶ In other words, the bravery and sacrifice of American soldiers accounts both for the success of the Surge and the escalating fatality rate in its

⁴⁵⁵ Eric Hamilton, “Development Fighting Al Qaeda in Iraq,” 3.

⁴⁵⁶ International Crisis Group, “After the Surge I: The New Sunni Landscape,” 30 April, 2008, 7.

early stages. In all, this new strategy helped American troops finally to gain the trust of the local population.

One U.S. military commander interviewed in March of 2008 by International Crisis Group explained how a modest surge in numbers, combined with increased Iraqi security forces, was utterly transforming the security situation:

My unit got [to a semi-rural neighborhood of ‘Arab Jbur, not far from Baghdad] in June 2007 as part of the Baghdad defensive belt. At the time there was no Iraqi police, no Iraqi Army, just a lot of al-Qaeda. Before the surge, we only had enough troops to focus on big population centers. ‘Arab Jbur had always been an insurgent stronghold, but al-Qaeda came in and drove out the Islamic Army, as well as many civilians. Throughout 2006 al-Qaeda was manufacturing VBIEDs [cars rigged to explode] there and sending them into Baghdad. We had a very tough fight working our way into the town. The local population worried we would be like other coalition troops – stay a couple of weeks and leave. Still a local sheikh produced three of his guys to help coalition forces find al-Qaeda fighters. They would also walk in the streets in front of the soldiers and point out IEDs [improvised explosive devices]. They explained this was out of rejection of al-Qaeda’s random and deliberate extreme violence. Al-Qaeda had controlled resources such as food and water, which led to passive support by the remaining population. When people understood we were here to stay, intelligence improved. The surge gave us the number of troops we needed to start living here.⁴⁵⁷

The cooperation of locals—essential to the identification of insurgents and their instruments of terror—only became possible thanks to increased troop numbers. (An important lesson must be derived from this. Insofar as the same dynamic is yielding the actionable intelligence American drones rely on to strike targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the consequences of early withdrawal are likely to be noticeable. Put another way, effective though hellfire missile strikes and covert missions against Al-Qaeda targets have been in the Afghan/Pakistan theater, they cannot be maintained at the current level

⁴⁵⁷ International Crisis Group, “After the Surge I,” 7.

without the troop presence sufficient to provide levels of security under which the local population will continue to provide actionable intelligence.)

The strategy underlying the Surge also highlighted (once again) the disjuncture between the White House and the civilian command at DOD on how aggressively nation building in Iraq was to be pursued. Secretary Rumsfeld initially opposed the Surge strategy (which Condoleezza Rice vociferously supported) and dismissed the “Clear-Hold-Build” strategy in these terms when it was first proposed in 2005:

Anyone who takes those three words and things it means the United States should clear and the United States should hold and the United States should build, doesn’t understand the situation. It is the Iraqis’ country. They’ve got 28 million people there. They are clearing, they are holding, they are building. They’re going to be the ones doing the reconstruction of that country.”⁴⁵⁸

Rice again won the argument, but the debate about adopting a new strategy went on in the administration, and as the Inspector General notes, the disagreement between Rice and Rumsfeld “soon appeared to be impeding the execution of the new strategy.”⁴⁵⁹

Even though the strategy remained “under-resourced for over a year,” its promise nonetheless “became increasingly apparent” as U.S. troops progressively eliminated insurgents where they had previously been strong.⁴⁶⁰ It was not until January of 2007 that President Bush announced the actual troop Surge that allowed the strategy to have its spectacular effect.

The importance of increasing the number of troops in Iraq and the bravery of those who

⁴⁵⁸ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 456-457.

⁴⁵⁹ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 457.

⁴⁶⁰ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 458.

confronted the insurgency cannot be overstated. It permitted the hold and built aspects of the approach instrumental to improving the security situation in Iraq. What cannot be ignored, however, and what is perhaps more important for our purposes, are the reasons Sunnis who had been induced and compelled to support the insurgency up to that point were newly disposed to cooperate with Coalition troops from the end of 2006 onward. Broadly speaking, two developments are of particular consequence: as *Al-Qaeda in Iraq* consolidated its hold in Anbar province and the Sunni triangle, its radicalism became more obvious to inhabitants of the area, provoking a counter-reaction; Coalition troops, meanwhile, were finally able to establish a working alliance with the tribal leadership, in part because the tribes began to recognize a threat to their own importance as the Islamists consolidated their authority.

Zarqawi's Grand Ambitions

After making a concerted effort to unify the insurgency through the middle of 2006, in part by abstaining from discussion of its long-term aims, *Al-Qaeda in Iraq* began to proceed too aggressively, in part because the insurgency was succeeding. We know from a letter sent from Ayman al-Zawahiri (second in command of Al-Qaeda's worldwide network) to Abu Musab Zarqawi in the summer of 2005, as well as from later public statements, that *Al-Qaeda* placed high importance on its Iraq operations. The 6,500 word communiqué, released on 6 October, 2005, lays out in intricate detail the aims of the *Al-Qaeda*-led insurgency in Iraq. Shmuel Bar and Yair Minzili, at the Center on Islam, Democracy

and the Future of the Muslim World, have argued that “the jihad in Iraq... is arguably the most profound development that the global jihadi movement has undergone since the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.”⁴⁶¹ The Al-Qaeda leadership recognized that their most important prerequisite is a jurisdiction they control, or which supports them, within which operatives can train and organize freely. They sought, therefore, to build in Iraq what had been dismantled in Afghanistan.⁴⁶²

Recognizing the importance of the Iraq theater to *Al-Qaeda*’s grandiose long-term aims (the reestablishment of an Islamic Caliphate, its coercive force dedicated to the instantiation of *sharia*), Zawahiri identifies two short-goals for Iraq’s *jihadists* in his letter to Zarqawi: first, expel U.S. forces (Zawahiri and Zarqawi believed the insurgency would precipitate a Vietnam-like withdrawal, as indeed it almost did); second, establish an Islamic emirate “over whatever Sunni territory in Iraq can be brought under its control.”⁴⁶³ *Al-Qaeda in Iraq* seemed well on its way to achieving both aims by the summer of 2006. Iraq was in chaos, the rising death-toll and fading hope had American politicians discussing withdrawal, insurgents controlled Anbar province, and in a

⁴⁶¹ Shmuel Bar and Yair Minzili, “The Zawahiri Letter and the Strategy of Al Qaeda,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 3 (2006), 38.

⁴⁶² The U.S. National Security Council appreciated the importance of a state sponsor—active or even passive—to a group like *Al-Qaeda* as early as 2001. Recall, for instance, that one of the first overarching justifications of the war to oust Saddam Hussein, on Feith’s presentation, was the deterrence value it was thought successful intervention against a relatively strong state might exert throughout the Islamic world. Nor is it outlandish to suggest that the Iraq war could have had this effect. Had Saddam Hussein’s regime been overthrown and a government friendlier to U.S. interests been (more cost-effectively) established, states with connections to terrorism including Iran, Syria, North Korea, even Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, may well have been persuaded to modify their behavior. (It is, no doubt, a tragic unintended consequence of the Iraq war that it had, for a time, created precisely the sort of jurisdiction it was envisioned to stanch while emboldening the behavior of the very enemy actors it was calculated to deter).

⁴⁶³ Shmuel Bar and Yair Minzili, “The Zawahiri Letter and the Strategy of Al Qaeda,” 40.

proclamation on 15 October, 2006, The Mujahedeen Shura Council (the umbrella group created by Zarqawi and, officially, the successor to *Al-Qaeda in Iraq*), declared the province to be an independent Islamic state. Indeed, the leaders of the insurgency no longer saw themselves as non-state actors fighting to liberate Iraq. They laid claim to de facto statehood—in the sense that they believed the insurgency had succeeded and driven out the occupier (radical *jihadists* believe the system of nation-states to be an illegitimate imperialist construct)—and strove to govern Al Anbar Province according to their brutal interpretation of *sharia* law. The independent political entity they believed they had created was called the Islamic State of Iraq, and was supposed to be a base from which to advance Al-Qaeda’s longer term aims.⁴⁶⁴

Nibras Kazimi, also at the Center on Islam, Democracy and the Future of the Muslim World, emphasizes in a 2008 report what a triumph the Al Anbar state, eventually to be

⁴⁶⁴ Nibras Kazimi observes that the announcement of “the Islamic State of Iraq was downplayed by American officials, analysts, and journalists as an ‘al-Qaeda affiliate’ rather than its successor.” It had, nonetheless, become at this point America’s most important foreign enemy—whether one prefers to call it a state, or simply the new seat of the radical Islamic terrorist network—making Iraq the central battleground in the war on terror. Kazimi suggests Americans were more or less oblivious to this development because due to partisan acrimony at home:

The American public was uncurious as to the identity, nature, and goals of its enemy in Iraq. And, unfortunately, U.S. leaders and commanders were mostly complicit in such willful unawareness. The lack of interest on the part of the public was partly due to bitter partisan recriminations over the Bush administration’s policy in waging the Iraq war, and over who in Washington was to blame for the insurgency that ensued. Consequently, the doctrines of the Bush administration regarding preemptive strikes and democracy in the Middle East came under incessant scrutiny from the administration’s domestic political foes. Meanwhile, the doctrines of the jihadists were overlooked or, in the few cases where they were considered, dismissed as esoteric. Fantastical as they may be, these doctrines do indeed motivate and inform the enemy’s actions and strategy, and their significance was not recognized (“The Caliphate Attempted,” 32).

ruled by a restored Caliphate, signified for the *jihadist* movement:

The creators of the Islamic State of Iraq understood it as the most ambitious jihadist venture to date. They could, they believed, lay claim to the leadership of the global jihadist movement, since they had surpassed in scope, purpose, and martial triumph the generation of jihadists that came before them, including bin Laden. Among other things, they believed that their state would elevate the Islamic struggle against the West to a new level of confrontation: rather than have disparate groups of jihadists retaliating against Western targets by terrorist means, the Islamic State of Iraq would confront its foes as would an emerging empire—and in the same fashion as the early Islamic conquests. Moreover, defeating the United States, the world's mightiest military and economic power, on the battlefield of Iraq was to be the harbinger of even greater victories for Islam.⁴⁶⁵

Thus the impending achievement of Zawahiri's short-term goals thanks to Zarqawi's leadership in Iraq seemed to make possible yet more ambitious undertakings. According to the letter, a *jihad* directed against the rest of Iraq and its neighboring states (in order to extend the Caliphate through the Sunni Arab world) was next on the agenda; and following that, armed struggle against Israel as well. The ultimate goal, of course, is the same as Osama Bin-Laden's: the eclipse of Western civilization by Islamic civilization, where the latter is defined along radical Salafi lines.

The putative leader of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq, Abu Abdullah al-Rashid al-Baghdadi, puts the new entity's *raison d'être* in precisely these terms:

Today, we are embarking on a new era, and a point of transformation for the region and the entire world, we are witnessing the end of that lie called Western civilization, and the rise of the Islamic giant, and this is exactly what Bush warned of in his latest speech in front of the veterans [August 22, 2007] saying: 'the region is developing in a way that threatens the downfall of civilization' and by that he means the civilization of unbelief, the civilization of usury and prostitution, the civilization of oppression and

⁴⁶⁵ Nibras Kazimi, "The Caliphate Attempted," 6.

humiliation. And he had this to say about the soldiers of the Islamic State of [Iraq]: ‘they seek to restore the caliphate from Spain to Indonesia’ after [the Americans] made clear that [the soldiers of the Islamic State] are only Sunni danger threatening America and its civilization, and this is the truth as testified to by the enemies.⁴⁶⁶

Portentous though these remarks are in themselves, their context is also important.

Baghdadi’s Sixth Speech was released on 9 July, 2007, and in it he is exhorting Sunni insurgents who were already beginning to turn away from his movement to continue supporting the radical Islamist cause. For by the middle of 2007, the insurgency was well on its way to coming apart.

Jihadist Overreach

By the end of 2006 and beginning of 2007, the *jihadists* were beginning to alienate the constituency that had to this point been their most important supporters—former Ba’athists, disenfranchised tribesman, “patriotic” Sunnis afraid for their future in a Shiite dominated Iraq. Recall that the insurgency’s cohesion had been a product of their shared short-term aim: to expel U.S. troops and foment sufficient turmoil to prevent a national Shiite ascendancy. This much effectively achieved in Anbar province—Coalition troops had essentially “lost” the governorate—the *jihadist* leadership proceeded beyond what the two wings of the insurgency could agree upon, and began to enforce *sharia* law in areas under their control.

The brutality of their tactics had long been a source of unease and dispute between the

⁴⁶⁶ Quoted in Nibras Kazimi, “The Caliphate Attempted,” 29.

two wings. Zawahiri had foreseen as much, and wrote to Zarqawi as early as the middle of 2005 urging him to end the practice of decapitating hostages, as well as to take other steps to moderate the insurgency's public image.⁴⁶⁷ *Al-Qaeda in Iraq* ultimately followed that advice. The beheadings stopped, and steps were taken to "Iraqify" the insurgency. *AQI* even issued numerous public statements denying that they were targeting Shiites or civilians specifically.⁴⁶⁸ In spite of these steps, finally in control of a province they called the Islamic State of Iraq, the *jihadists*—most of them Iraqi, but not necessarily natives of Al Anbar—began to enforce their more radical interpretation of *sharia* much more aggressively. Their most spectacular acts of brutality were no longer publicized, but everyday brutality in the name of Islam became more and more common in areas controlled by the insurgents.

Increasingly, they were making the sort of mistake that American troops had made with devastating consequence in the first years of the occupation, but to a degree and with an impunity, it is hard to imagine. In the name of a purer Islam (American troops were aiming to secure the country after the fall of its government), Al-Qaeda's fighters were more and more brazenly transgressing tribal cultural *mores*: expelling, intimidating, and killing local sheiks; forcibly taking wives in an effort to establish roots; assassinating policemen, the educated, the wealthy, and landholders—all in order to eliminate the existing structure of authority in favor of consolidating their own power. The radical *jihadists* even harassed and terrorized ordinary Sunni civilians—thitherto their own

⁴⁶⁷ "Zawahiri letter" in Gilles Keppel, *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*.

⁴⁶⁸ International Crisis Group, "After the Surge I," 2.

supporters!—who were, for whatever absurd reason, not Islamic enough according to what commentators have called “the most ruthless and primitive version of Salafi Islam.”⁴⁶⁹ Shaving was banned; smokers lost their fingers.⁴⁷⁰

Needless to say, *jihadist* dogmas and the instability they wrought made economic recovery all but impossible. Thus, *jihadists* progressively lost Sunni support as they grew more assertive. *AQI*, in effect, undermined the very aspects of civil society most Sunnis believed they were fighting the insurgency to protect from an American-backed Shiite-dominated regime. As *AQI* began to show its true face, governing in ways more frightening even than what propagandists could accuse the Shiite dominated national government of plotting, it became increasingly clear that they were a more serious threat to the population. One man sympathetic to the insurgent cause, and no enemy of *jihad* in principle, but who ultimately supported the surge as a *sahwa* leader, explains his problem with the *jihadists* this way:

We have nothing against mujahidin fighting in the name of God. But these people tarnished the notion of jihad. They targeted educated people and tribal leaders, they blurred lines and interfered in everything. They banned cigarettes and even ruled that tomatoes and cucumbers couldn't be mixed together. They blew up mobile phone relays. Islam never taught us decapitation. Those committing these crimes often were foreign to Fallujah – not necessarily foreigners, but ignorant peasants who killed people as if slaughtering mere animals.⁴⁷¹

Thus, the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq in Anbar province, and barbaric practices the *jihadists* adopted there and everywhere they could claim nominal control,

⁴⁶⁹ International Crisis Group, “After the Surge I,” 3

⁴⁷⁰ Marc A Thiessen, “Obama’s Inheritance: Al-Qaeda in Retreat,” *World Affairs* (Summer 2009), 3.

⁴⁷¹ International Crisis Group, “After the Surge I,” 13-14.

finally revealed for all to see that the two wings of the insurgency—to that point working together (if often uneasily)—had radically different end-games. The first group wanted the Americans out; but they did not want to live under a brutal Islamist-fascist despotism. As we have noted, they had been willing to fight for a host of things: to preserve some degree of tribal autonomy, for an independent Iraq, to restore personal, familial, or tribal honor, to prevent Shiite ascent with American backing. Once American troops—reinforced by the Surge as well as newly trained Iraqi soldiers—proved they could fill the vacuums that had, to that point, permitted the insurgency’s continuing intensification, an entire wing of the insurgency was suddenly amenable to, in essence, switching sides.

This wing of the insurgency realized the *ihadists* represented a greater threat to the very interests that had originally impelled them to forcibly resist the coalition, than American troops or Shiite politicians could ever pose. What is more, while the first wing was fighting a resistance battle that had, in principle at least, a clear end date—the withdrawal of American troops—the *ihadists* battle was only just beginning. For them, forcing the U.S. to leave Iraq was the first step, mere preparation for decades of violent struggle, for a global *ihad* that was to be headquartered in the part of Iraq they called home. Tribal leaders had been fighting for primarily pragmatic reasons (if often their ardor was stoked by religious arguments they were sensitive to). They were not, however, committed ideologues; that is, they were not devoted to an maximalist interpretation of Islamic doctrine to the prejudice of every other aspect of their lives. Quite understandably, they were uninterested in living at the center of a perpetual war that aimed to make an enemy of virtually every reigning Arab ruler and the whole of Western Civilization. Radical

Islamists were promising an armed struggle in the name of Islam that would go on for generations; American troops were promising to leave as soon as practicable.

Recognizing these things, at the end of 2006 Sunni tribal leaders in Al Anbar formed an Awakening Council to push back against *Al-Qaeda in Iraq*.

American forces noted this split between the insurgency's two wings, and with it, an opportunity. To the promise of security (increasingly credible thanks to the Clear-Hold-Built approach to counter-insurgency operations and the Surge that was in its early stages), they added the prospect of patronage, hiring Sunnis to help fight the Islamist insurgents. The strategy, which began in Al Anbar where *AQI* was strongest, was replicated virtually everywhere the insurgents were operating freely. Once *AQI* was revealed to represent a real threat to non-extremist Iraqis of every creed, a new (if reluctant) willingness to work with the Coalition emerged.

The shift of allegiance made possible by the Surge is referred to as the Anbar Awakening or *sahwa* in Anbar province and the "Sons of Iraq" initiative elsewhere, though both terms are sometimes used to describe the phenomenon as a whole. Much as Saddam Hussein once paid tribal leaders for their loyalty and employed their sons—indeed, the end of that arrangement is one of the reasons they participated in the insurgency when Saddam Hussein's regime fell—so the Coalition began basically to purchase the loyalty of moderate Sunnis in Al Anbar, Baghdad's environs, and the rest of the Sunni triangle. As of October 2008, 99,859 sons of Iraq were registered with the U.S. military, their average

monthly pay ranging from \$171 to \$368. Another 25,000 support U.S. troops in Anbar province on a voluntary basis as part of the Awakening.⁴⁷²

Many of those now fighting *Al Qaeda in Iraq* were at one time passive, some of them active, supporters of the insurgency. (Not unimportantly, *de facto* amnesty for those with U.S. blood on their hands was extended to former insurgents willing to fight Al-Qaeda). The tribal leadership, newly empowered (or re-empowered), is for now exerting its influence to help route the remaining *jihadists*. Sons of Iraq and Awakening members have as their basic mission policing. They patrol neighborhoods, man checkpoints, and, of course, gather intelligence. They have been trained, but not heavily armed, by the Coalition. Major engagements with *jihadists* are still left to American forces and the best-trained divisions of the Iraqi Army.

Jihadists themselves blame the Awakening and the Surge for the reversal in their fortunes.

As one former insurgent explained to *International Crisis Group*,

I'm stuck; there is nothing I can do. The *sahwa* walks hand in hand with the Americans and that's extremely bad for us. There is no doubt we have been weakened. It's become extremely difficult to move in Fallujah and throughout the region. Some have left for Ba'quba and Mosul, where room for maneuver is greater, but here we are in an open prison. The surge was never the problem. The Americans are not that dangerous. They have the technology, but they don't know the topography. We know the terrain, we're on our land. More U.S. troops alone simply could have meant more and perhaps easier targets. But we've been betrayed by our own brethren. They use the pretext of fighting al-Qaeda to crack down on anyone who does not comply with their rule. If they find a weapon, they say it's al-Qaeda.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² Brookings Institute, "Iraq Index," November 2008, 12.

⁴⁷³ International Crisis Group, "After the Surge I," 12.

The *Institute for the Study of War* quotes a “senior AQI leader” then operating in Anbar province who agrees that losing the support of Iraqis long tolerant or supportive of their activities marked a turning point: “the turnaround of the Sunnis against us had made us lose a lot and suffer very painfully.”⁴⁷⁴

An underappreciated contributing factor to the dramatic reduction in violence is the impact of a simultaneous progress in stanching Shiite radicalism. The most radical non-governmental Shiite militia, Moqtada Al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army, willingly ceased hostilities in response to the increase in American troop levels (and a very large payment). Nouri Al-Maliki, who narrowly won his nomination to the Prime Minister’s office thanks to Sadrist support in 2006, later broke with the Al-Sadr’s faction in early 2008. In March, he used the Iraqi army to oust the Mahdi army from Basra (a move that surprised U.S. officials), later continuing the assault in their stronghold, Sadr City, Baghdad’s sprawling Shiite slum.

As Peter Galbraith pointed out at the end of 2008, “in 2006 and 2007, both the Sunnis and Shiites fought civil wars within their communities,” what in each resulted the emergence of “relative ‘moderates.’”⁴⁷⁵ These moderates seem, indeed, to reject civil strife as a means to accomplishing their ends. This question, however, remains: have their ends changed?

⁴⁷⁴ Farook Ahmed, “Sons of Iraq and Awakening Forces,” *Institute for the Study of War*, Backgrounder #23, 21 February, 2008, 2.
<http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/reports/Backgrounder%2023%20Sons%20of%20Iraq%20and%20Awakening%20Forces.pdf>

⁴⁷⁵ Peter Galbraith, “Is This a ‘Victory,’” *New York Times Review of Books*, 27 September, 2008.
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2008/oct/23/is-this-a-victory/?pagination=false>

Put another way, it is apparent that the Sunnis who supported the insurgency (as well as the insurgency's moderate wing) can be co-opted to the extent their interests can be made to align with the Coalition's. Whether this is evidence that the insurgency could have been prevented—or at least prevented from reaching civil war-like proportions—remains unclear. We can, of course, speculate. Had tribal leaders been engaged (and paid off) from the onset, had the Iraqi army not been so casually disbanded, had de-Ba'athification not been permitted to become something resembling the de-Sunnification of Iraq, it stands to reason the insurgency could have been deprived of the fuel that fed its tragic intensification. On the other hand, it is not clear that this more pragmatic wing of the insurgency would have recognized that their interests are better served by America's vision for Iraq than the radical *jihadists*' had not AQI revealed their terrifying end-game for all to see, this with a clarity only their brutality and fear-inspiring tactics could afford. Perversely, it is the *jihadists*' initial success, followed by their overreach, that provided the U.S. with an important “hearts and minds” victory in the war against radical Islam that reaches well beyond Iraq. President Bush described the significance of the success of the surge in 2008 this way:

For the terrorists, Iraq was supposed to be a place where al-Qaeda rallied Arab masses to drive America out. Instead, Iraq has become the place where Arabs joined the Americans to drive al-Qaeda out.⁴⁷⁶

Indeed, the popularity of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, and of their aims and methods, has cratered everywhere they have had opportunity to show their true colors.⁴⁷⁷

What remains an open question, then, is whether the accommodation of former

⁴⁷⁶ Marc A Thiessen, “Obama’s Inheritance: Al-Qaeda in Retreat,” 3.

⁴⁷⁷ Marc A Thiessen, “Obama’s Inheritance: Al-Qaeda in Retreat,” 3.

insurgents is anything more than opportunistic: driven by a new imperative (ridding the countryside of Al-Qaeda in Iraq), as well as a desire to amass whatever political spoils they can with the aid of U.S. pressure. Are Sunnis, who for so long opposed the occupation, today cooperating with Coalition forces and the Iraqi government because they are interested in building a stable and modern regime? Or are they cooperating because the American alternative is the better of two, from their perspective, irredeemably imperfect alternatives. That is, does the moderate wing of the insurgency believe their interests align with America's (a stable, unified, moderate government in Iraq); or did they calculate that their interests were served by a temporary tactical alliance with the U.S. military, one they forged for the sake of routing a common enemy and improving their positioning the national government?

Similarly, one must ask why Prime Minister Maliki used the Iraqi government to route Moqtada al-Sadr's the Mahdi Army? Was it to end sectarian violence as a prelude to Sunni-Shiite reconciliation? Or was it to consolidate his party's authority—his own authority, even—within Iraq's Shiite community in order to maintain a near-monopoly on government authority in Iraq? The security gains created by the Surge, the *sahwa*, and Maliki's campaign against Shiite radicalism, are no doubt very real; but the motivations of these moderate Iraqis must be evaluated before we can jump to the conclusion that a new era of politics is about to dawn in the country.

Political Progress in a Stabilized Iraq?

Against the spectacular success of the surge, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that one of its dominant ends was to provide space and opportunity for a national political reconciliation. General Keane, an architect of the Surge, provided this assessment of its success, and suggested in the Spring of 2008 that there was reason to hope it would be translated into political progress.

Fundamental to that success was the use of proven counter-insurgency practices, to protect the people, with sufficient amounts of Iraq and U.S. troops. This was a catalyst for the widespread Sunni awakening movement What really happened is the Sheiks and tribal leaders decided they could not achieve their political goals with the AQI [al-Qaeda in Iraq], in fighting the U.S. and the GOI [government of Iraq]. As such the overwhelming majority of Sunni leaders made four strategic decisions to 1) stop the violence; 2) leverage the U.S. leaders to influence the GOI; 3) reconcile with the GOI; and 4) provide their “sons” to work with us and the Iraqis to help defeat the AQI and protect their own people.... Clearly the Sunnis are politically reconciling with the GOI, and the GOI is assisting.⁴⁷⁸

While the security gains are both impressive and incontestable, it is not clear the gains will be permanent. Many are concerned that the peace will only last as long as the intersection of interests. In the mean time, this large group of Sunnis—long disaffected and prone to becoming so again absent real political progress in Iraq—has been organized, trained, and (lightly) armed. An *International Crisis Group* report cautions that in the solution to the problem represented by AQI, another problem may be germinating:

the *sahwat*... are not on their way to becoming a self-sufficient, autonomous force. Instead, they remain thoroughly dependent on an outside sponsor... Were the U.S. abruptly to end its support, it follows, the situation would essentially revert to the status quo ante: sheikhs would either be targeted in Iraq by vengeful insurgents or return to (more

⁴⁷⁸ General Keane, “Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee,” 9 April, 2008.

comfortable) exile abroad; their militias would either evaporate or blend in with the insurgency. Without U.S. backing, the *sahwat* would fade away or offer themselves up to the next highest bidder.⁴⁷⁹

The report goes on to conclude that “the *sahwat* provide a temporary fix which does not begin to resolve—and may perhaps even further exacerbate—the deeper, more fundamental problem of rebuilding a legitimate and functional state.”⁴⁸⁰ An *Institute for the Study of War* report makes a similar point. Noting that the “permanence of [the *sahwat*] change of heart is hotly contested,” and that the Shiite dominated Iraqi government is concerned that it will be unable to control these Sunni-dominated movements, Farook Ahmed cautions that absent genuine political accommodation between Sunnis and Shiites, “the security situation could destabilize as U.S. forces draw down from the Surge.”⁴⁸¹

Nouri al-Maliki, the Iraqi Prime Minister, has made clear he does not trust the Sons of Iraq movement. His reticence to embrace what is essentially a Sunni militia is, moreover, understandable. Many of its leaders are ideologically linked to the Ba’ath and served in Saddam Hussein’s military; many of those paid by the U.S. to seek out *AQI* first spent years fighting the establishment of a new regime in Iraq. Peter Galbraith, a man with experience in Iraq who has been one of the most consistently thoughtful commentators on the war, cautions against the view that *sahwat* is made up of patriotic Iraqis fighting Iraq from love of country. Better, he suggests, to view them as mercenaries who in the

⁴⁷⁹ International Crisis Group, “After the Surge I,” 15.

⁴⁸⁰ International Crisis Group, “After the Surge I,” 16.

⁴⁸¹ Farook Ahmed, “Sons of Iraq and Awakening Forces,” 12.

end “reject Iraq’s new Shiite-led order.”⁴⁸² To wit, commentators pointed to a significant uptick in unclaimed *sahwat* checks at the end of 2010 as possible evidence a recent recruitment campaign by remnants of the insurgency was yielding fruit.⁴⁸³

If understandable on the one hand, the Maliki government’s demonstrated reluctance to incorporate Sons of Iraq into the (already bloated) national security apparatus is, nonetheless, cause for concern on the other. Evidence that even the most thoroughly vetted Sunnis are being turned down, and those few who are admitted subjected to inordinate application delays as compared to Shiites with comparable qualifications, does not bode well for the possibility of meaningful reconciliation.⁴⁸⁴ Nor does the fact that high-ranking positions in the Iraqi administrative apparatus, especially the security apparatus, remain virtually impenetrable to Sunnis. Worse, Maliki’s use of the national government to weaken the movement by arresting its leaders in mixed Shiite-Sunni provinces further demonstrates his proclivity to utilize the authority of the state against its people as and how he sees fit.⁴⁸⁵ The persistent institutionalized discrimination against Sunnis by the national government recalls the darkest days of the insurgency. Shiite domination of the Interior Ministry led to the slaughter of Sunnis by men wearing government-issued uniforms. Today, Sunnis are not being slaughtered, but it remains clear that Iraq’s government is controlled by a faction intent upon using the state’s

⁴⁸² Peter Galbraith, “Is This a ‘Victory?’”

⁴⁸³ Timothy Williams, “Sunnis in Iraq Allied with U.S. Quitting to Rejoin Rebels,” *The New York Times*, 16 October, 2010.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/17/world/middleeast/17awakening.html?pagewanted=all>; cf. Martin Chulov, “Fears of Al-Qaida return in Iraq as US-backed fighters defect,” *The Guardian*, 10 August, 2010. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/10/al-qaida-sons-of-iraq>

⁴⁸⁴ International Crisis Group, “After the Surge.”

⁴⁸⁵ International Crisis Group, “Iraq’s Provincial Elections: The Stakes,” 27 January, 2009, 21.

authority advance its own parochial interests. Nothing could be further from the rule of law where all are equal before it.

If it remains unclear whether the Sons of Iraq movement represents a permanent shift in Sunni allegiance, it is even less clear that an improved security situation can be translated into political progress. Iraq's national government has remained paralyzed along sectarian lines, and the prospects of resolving disputes regarding resource-revenue from new developments, the genuine reversal of Iraq's Shiite-led overzealous de-Ba'athification laws, Iraqi federalism, and the status of Kirkuk remain bleak. Everyday governance meanwhile—from the naming of important ministers and the staffing of important government bureaucracies, to the dispersal of budgeted funds—is systematically stymied as factions jockeying for advantage on these larger, apparently intractable, problems hold cooperation on every issue hostage to their most important demands.⁴⁸⁶

The success of the Surge and the Sons of Iraq initiative thus brings us to our next question: why do Iraqi politicians remain deadlocked in spite of such impressive security gains? This question raises an even more fundamental question: was sectarian violence the main impediment to political progress toward a unified and moderate liberal democracy in Iraq, in the first place? The utter inability of Iraq's parliament to seize the opportunity provided by the Surge in order to resolve the country's paralyzing political disputes suggests that the answer to this question may be “no.”

⁴⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, “Iraq's Provincial Elections,” 9.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICAL PARALYSIS AND ITS (DEEP-ROOTED) CAUSES

No doubt, the insurgency exacerbated Iraq's political tensions, and its political tensions, the insurgency. Since the Surge, however, government favoritism and corruption on a grand scale, political dysfunction, and the use of government to advantage the country's dominant sect have persisted. Put another way, the same dynamic that fuelled the insurgency has prevented significant progress toward optimists' end-game for Iraq. The passions and hatreds that manifested violently have shaped Iraq's politics from day one, and continue to do so post-Surge. This is revealed most clearly by three trends: first, the difficulty secular nationalist politicians have had gaining political traction; second, politicians incapacity to put nation above sect; and third, the use and abuse of the constitutional process and new liberties in Iraq to advantage sect to the detriment of the possibility of a stable and united country.

Little Popular Support for National Unity on Secular Grounds

The only prominent Iraqi politician to articulate a vision of Iraq's future similar to the one that drove the optimists in the administration to support a policy of regime change, Ayad Allawi, mustered little popular support in Iraq through the first three national elections. While he did well enough in the latest round of elections (January 2010) to contest the Prime Ministry, after a 9-month stalemate, the Shiite bloc that has controlled

Iraq's government since January of 2005 maintained its hold on the legislative and executive branches, and therefore, the main levers of political power.

A wealthy Shiite from a prominent Iraqi family, Ayad Allawi spent most of his adult life in London, driven into exile after participating in a failed coup in 1978. By some accounts, he was the Iraqi favored by the British to lead a provisional government in Iraq. He did lead Iraq's interim government—in place between the disintegration of Bremer's CPA in June of 2004 and Iraq's first national election in January of 2005. His selection by Iraq's highly partisan Governing Council (the body of Iraqis that shared authority with the CPA) was in a way accidental. Most, including Iraq aspiring politicians, did not take his initial candidacy seriously.⁴⁸⁷ He was only elected because he was “last man standing” once Iraq's competing factions had mutually frustrated each other's attempts to nominate favorite partisans. The Shiite bloc in government reportedly consulted Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shiite cleric, about Allawi's candidacy. The religious leader only acquiesced to the nomination of a liberal, secular, technocrat “because all the Islamists had been vetoed,” and because he “was banking on a quick transition to the constitutional elections,” a process those loyal to him were almost sure to dominate.⁴⁸⁸

Ayad Allawi is, without a doubt, the most nationalistic, most liberal, and most pragmatic Iraqi yet to hold considerable power in the country. A Shiite, he nonetheless opposed sweeping de-Ba'athification from the beginning, arguing that most of those who joined did so as a “vehicle to live.” As head of the Governing Council, he took steps to

⁴⁸⁷ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 284.

⁴⁸⁸ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 284.

reintegrate former Ba'athists;⁴⁸⁹ he also demonstrated a rare willingness to engage Moqtada's al-Sadr's Mahdi Army aggressively while it was becoming a surpassingly powerful organization.⁴⁹⁰ He offered amnesty to insurgents, Shiite and Sunni alike, while meeting with insurgent leaders personally in the hope of bringing them into the political process. He even knew when to eschew liberal democratic ideals, limiting newly established press freedoms in an effort to quell violence by silencing some of its instigators, and encouraging the U.S. to delay elections when it began to look as though free and fair elections would elevate an Islamist government and partisan Prime Minister. Most important, he began assembling an alliance between political elites, professional officers, and "apolitical technocrats" that crossed sectarian and ideological lines.⁴⁹¹ Only by reaching out to those for whom religion was not a dominant concern was he able to build a party representative of Iraq's diversity and committed to liberal and democratic ideals, what he hoped would form a durable ruling coalition (he permitted Islamists only a minority role).⁴⁹² Known as the Iraqi List, the party contested the 2005 election on a platform that emphasized security and competent management.

As the elections approached, fears mounted that illiberal Islamists were likely to win power in Iraq by democratic means, especially as violence increased throughout the country. Though the U.S. refused a postponement, there was, belatedly, some recognition that very much was at stake. CPA Order 96 stipulated that delegates would be selected proportionately, from closed party lists (that is, put forward by the party

⁴⁸⁹ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 151.

⁴⁹⁰ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 290.

⁴⁹¹ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 337.

⁴⁹² Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 337-38.

leadership, not determined by a caucus system), because planners mistakenly believed secularists and minorities stood to gain the most if their support across localities could somehow be amalgamated. As Allawi sums up, “senior CPA democracy and election advisers” worried “that a constituency-based election would produce a lopsided majority for the Islamists from both sects, and would seriously harm the prospects of liberal-minded groups and minorities.”⁴⁹³

Their rationale was not absurd. The insurgency had not yet entered its more destructive phase and planners had yet to recognize the depth of Islamist sentiment in the country. Furthermore, they believed secular liberals had little chance of winning pluralities in localized single-member districts; for their support was diffused across the country while Islamists of both sects (as well as the Kurds) had highly concentrated support in localities they dominated. On the assumption that there were nonetheless significant numbers (though far from a plurality) of moderates in every district, planners (Allawi singles out Larry Diamond, in particular) proposed an electoral system that would represent the totality of their support. A proportional list system, the Coalition hoped, would yield a relatively liberal government.⁴⁹⁴

Diamond, for his part, explains that planners were trying to make the best of a bad situation. The CPA had come up with a genius plan for indirect elections by way of provincial selection caucuses, one that bore notable resemblance to the design (and shared the goals) of the Electoral College system as put forward at America’s Founding.

⁴⁹³ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 335.

⁴⁹⁴ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 335.

In each of Iraq's 18 provinces, the CPA would supervise the establishment of a 15-member "organization committee." The organization committee would, in turn, choose the members of a selection caucus for each province. (The selection caucuses would proceed to elect representatives to the national assembly in proportion to their share of Iraq's total population.) The idea was to ensure moderate Iraqis would elect moderate and public spirit representatives; indirect selection of the legislative branch by Iraqis acceptable to all factions seemed a promising way to ensure this, and thus, refine and enlarge the public view. The CPA was finally applying the lessons of the Federalist Papers and America's Constitutional Convention. By employing a complicated method selection designed to identify moderate electors, the influence of sectarian affinities could be reduced, and the representatives themselves insulated from the vagaries of public opinion.

To ensure Iraqis of a variety of sects and persuasion made it onto the selection caucuses, CPA planners proposed taking two further steps. The make-up of the 15-member organization committees would be determined in a way that would allow equal input from the local, state, and national bodies the CPA had already established. Iraq's interim Governing Council would select five members in every province, the local provincial councils, five more; and the five largest local (in most cases, city) councils in each province, the remaining five. Furthermore, to ensure the provincial selection caucuses were not dominated by members of a single faction or group in relatively homogenous provinces, the organizing committees charged with establishing them would be required to solicit nominations from political parties, provincial and local councils, professional

and civic associations, university faculties, and tribal and religious groups (including minorities). Moreover, nominations to the selection caucuses charged with electing the national assembly would require a 9-vote supermajority on the organization committee. This would help empower minorities to (slightly more easily) block nominations that appeared to be narrowly partisan choices.⁴⁹⁵

Unfortunately, Ayatollah al-Sistani's opposition to the caucus method was "intractable."⁴⁹⁶ He had previously issued a *fatwa* categorically rejecting Bremer's insistence that unelected experts draft Iraq's Constitution *before* national elections could be held.⁴⁹⁷ He objected, moreover, professedly on the basis of majoritarian (as opposed to Islamic) principles, declaring "elections must be held so that every eligible Iraqi can choose someone to represent him at the constitutional convention that will write the constitution."⁴⁹⁸ It was a naked power grab couched in democratic terms for popular resonance. Noah Feldman, who had served the Coalition as senior advisor on constitutional issues, warned presciently at the time "the end constitutional product is very likely to make many people in the U.S. government unhappy. It's not going to look the way people imagine it looking."⁴⁹⁹ As he went on to explain, "Any democratically

⁴⁹⁵ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 80.

⁴⁹⁶ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 157.

⁴⁹⁷ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 213.

⁴⁹⁸ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 44.

⁴⁹⁹ David Rennie, "New Iraq 'well on way to becoming Islamic state,'" *The Telegraph*, 23 October, 2003. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1445414/New-Iraq-well-on-way-to-becoming-Islamic-state.html>.

elected Iraqi government is unlikely to be secular, and unlikely to be pro-Israel. And frankly, moderately unlikely to be pro-American.”⁵⁰⁰

Ayatollah al-Sistani was using his considerable authority to ensure Feldman’s prediction would come true. Having won the Constitutional battle, he was now insisting that the elections that would determine the delegates to the convention be as direct as possible. In both cases, his intention was the same: empower the country’s Shiite majority to govern Iraq immediately and forever. As Allawi explains, CPA officials already harbored a “genuine concern that an elected constitutional assembly would result in a majority of Islamists, both Shiite and Sunni, who would derail the entire project of enshrining Western constitutional and political principles in Iraq’s new Constitution.”⁵⁰¹ They understood the importance of leveraging Western expertise when it came to the task of drafting Iraq’s foundational document. Thus, the high importance advisors like Larry Diamond placed on the caucus method of selecting the politicians who would control the Constitutional Convention after Iraq’s first national election.

Again, however, CPA planners caved in the face of Shiite Islam’s most important religious authority in Iraq. In the face of Sistani’s objections, CPA planners considered nine alternative electoral systems.⁵⁰² The White House and the Pentagon were pressuring Bremer to transfer authority to an elected body of Iraqis as soon as possible in the face of mounting public frustration, which made most of the alternatives logistically impossible.

⁵⁰⁰ David Rennie, “New Iraq ‘well on way to becoming Islamic state’” <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1445414/New-Iraq-well-on-way-to-becoming-Islamic-state.html>. 23 October, 2003.

⁵⁰¹ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 44.

⁵⁰² Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 157-158.

On so short a timeline, single-member plurality elections were a non-starter insofar as census data did not exist; it would be impossible to draw up fair districts without a long postponement and considerable groundwork.⁵⁰³ Iraq almost *had to be* treated as a single electoral district to hold elections quickly. It was determined that the parties would put forth their own lists of candidates. Candidates would be elected to the national assembly from those lists in proportion to the share of the national vote each party received. As Diamond explains, the decision, though far from ideal, “was understandable, considering the political, administrative, and time pressures.”⁵⁰⁴ Open party lists might have yielded more moderate candidates. But mounting security concerns precluded the organization of some type of caucus through which ordinary Iraqis could be empowered to determine the make-up of the lists.⁵⁰⁵ Sistani, moreover, would reject any electoral system that failed to translate Shiites’ numerical superiority into concrete political gains, and the CPA feared the consequences of alienating him to Iraq’s fragile and deteriorating security situation. The best available electoral alternative seemed to be a single district closed-list election according to the principles of proportional representation.

The decision turned out to be catastrophic. Instead of privileging moderates (who were spread across the country) in contrast to sect-based parties which tended to have highly localized support, the electoral system instead ensured the election of the most assertive members from each party. Iraq’s first election was also its first census; virtually everyone voted according to sectarian loyalty. Iraq’s competing factions naturally put forth lists of

⁵⁰³ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 268.

⁵⁰⁴ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 259

⁵⁰⁵ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 157.

candidates that located the most zealous defenders of partisan interests at the top. The election was all but destined to yield a highly polarized and dysfunctional government.

John Agresto explains that the error was, in part, traceable to notions popular among *bien-pensants* committed to diversity above all who insist that the best democracy is the one that best *mirrors* the population. What matters most, on this interpretation, is that the population's demographic diversity, its plethora of sexual orientations, members of every socio-economic class, etc., etc., etc., are represented in the legislature in proportion to their share of the population. Insofar as proportional representation advantages the most assertive members of each group—and ensures that each group wins representation—its tendency is to radicalize political disputes. As Agresto explains,

Proportional representation... leads us away from containing and moderating the passions that so often drive people and popular groups, passions and interests often antagonistic to the rights of individuals and destructive to what once we called "the common good." Proportional representation was certainly not the kind of restrained and liberal democracy the Founders of this country had hoped to give us.⁵⁰⁶

To make matters worse, Sistani worked to ensure religious affinities would determine Iraqis' voting behavior. Aware of this possibility, and fearful that Sistani's considerable influence over Iraq's Shiites could swing the election, Ayad Allawi (again with U.S. support) publicly challenged the Shiite scholarly establishment to remain neutral, or at least quiet, as the election approached. Some had asserted that Sistani's quietism differentiated him markedly from the religious scholars in Iran who headed its theocracy. Far from remaining above the political fray, however, Sistani played a determining role,

⁵⁰⁶ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 108.

actively pressuring Shiite Islamist leaders to consolidate their support behind a single party, ultimately known as the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA). Sistani himself led the effort to elaborate a platform around which the various Shiite parties could unite. The Shiite religious leader proceeded to make clear he expected the Shiite rank and file to vote *en masse* along sectarian lines.

As the election approached, the mosque became the center of the Shiite world in Iraq and its influence spilled into the political sphere. Influential preachers were overtly political in their demands and reached thousands through their sermons, which also circulated on cassette tape (a tactic borrowed from Ayatollah Khomeini, who incited the Iranian revolution from Paris via in the same way). Preachers extolled “the ‘rights of the majority’” which, as Ali A. Allawi notes, amounted to “nothing less than a demand for Shi’a rule.”⁵⁰⁷ The same passions and hatreds that fuelled the insurgency quickly came to define Iraq’s affairs of state; democratic institutions and new rights—even the constitutional process and the document it yielded—became weapons in the pursuit of narrow sectarian influence. As the Inspector General notes in his report on Iraq’s reconstruction, “Iraqi politics was reduced to a battle for control among sects, none of which was directly accountable to voters for the delivery of services or other basic government functions.”⁵⁰⁸ U.S. soldiers and the American treasury remained responsible for governing the country long Iraqi politicians officially gained sovereignty.

⁵⁰⁷ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 382.

⁵⁰⁸ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 469.

Allawi marvels at the “remarkable” political accomplishments of Ayatollah al-Sistani over the period of CPA rule. He ensured the future Shiite domination of Iraq’s politics by mobilizing Iraq’s Shiite community at a time no compelling national leader existed to put forth a competing view. Somewhat perversely, he achieved this in large part by appealing to the authority of Islam even as he argued from democratic, majoritarian, principles.⁵⁰⁹ American planners’ failure to understand Sistani and his motivations made all of this possible. Policymakers (including, it seems, Bremer himself)⁵¹⁰ were eager to link him to the “quietist” tradition in Shiite Islam, some going so far as to attribute to him “a belief in the separation of ‘mosque and state.’”⁵¹¹ Allawi calls this a “ludicrous interpolation of a western secular concept into an entirely different tradition.”⁵¹² While Sistani had never argued for the political supremacy of the scholars on the Iranian model, he did condemn Iranian President Khatami’s experiment in reformist Islam in “scathing” terms. As Allawi explains, Sistani has always been skeptical about the possibility of religious pluralism and while he has never demanded the direct rule of the scholars, he has always maintained the state’s duty to protect Islam.⁵¹³ This requires, moreover, a guardianship of the jurisprudent over the social and political matters of the state. Scholars are not expected to manage the state in any practical sense (in fact, he believes the direct intersection of power and religion tends to corrupt the “reputation and authority of the *ulema*”). Politicians are, however, expected to defer to the religious hierarchy in matters

⁵⁰⁹ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 231.

⁵¹⁰ C.f. L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 165, 195.

⁵¹¹ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 208.

⁵¹² Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 208.

⁵¹³ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 208-210

social and political, as indeed they deferred to Sistani as they jockeyed to mold the new Iraqi regime.⁵¹⁴

Allawi is no doubt correct about Sistani's achievement. Although the sitting Prime Minister, Ayad Allawi, ran the best campaign according to most observers, the Sistani-backed UIA "got out the vote" and crushed Allawi's more secular, more experienced, and more representative party in the country's first democratic election. A Shiite coalition, supported by the main Kurdish parties as necessary, has ruled Iraq since 2005, through three national elections. In the end, the 2005 elections and the transfer of authority did not quell the insurgency as many had hoped, but instead led to its dramatic intensification. As Ali A. Allawi notes, free and fair elections had nothing to do with liberalism, reconciliation, or limited government, as Western audiences expected and politicians hoped: "They were about the empowerment and disempowerment of entire peoples; rectifying historical wrongs and affirming age-old verities; suppressed national rights and the identity of an entire country."⁵¹⁵ The Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction made a similar observation. Far from improving the security situation, the 2005 election—which was to have been a crowning achievement and harbinger of Iraq's promising future—instead "institutionalized an imbalance of power that was to deepen mistrust among Shi's, Sunni, and Kurdish communities."⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁴ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 210.

⁵¹⁵ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 387.

⁵¹⁶ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 469

Politicians Putting Sectarian Interests Ahead of the Nation

Iraqi politicians, almost without exception, have used their authority to advance narrow sectarian aims at the cost of the national interest or common good.

Ahmed Chalabi, the man Pentagon planners initially favored to lead a provisional government made up of Iraqi externals, was one of the only Iraqis charged with significant responsibility when Bremer opted instead for a protracted period of U.S. rule. A Shiite with a checkered past, and by all accounts highly intelligent and quite competent, he spearheaded Iraq's de-Ba'athification committee. Chalabi's approach was more aggressive than planners expected, what helped create the perception that the U.S. was supporting a Shiite-led initiative to de-Sunnify Iraq. Bremer himself acknowledge that deBa'athification had been applied "unevenly and unjustly" under Chalabi and adjusted the policy in order to permit some teachers and professors to return to work. Chalabi described Bremer's move as tantamount to "allowing Nazis into the German government after WWII"—words, apparently, calculated to inflame.⁵¹⁷ Sunni demands (generally supported by the U.S.) that Iraq's Shiite-led governments undo the damage he caused in the first months of the occupation, and Shiite counter-efforts to stymie any serious reversal of Iraq's deep de-Ba'athification, convulsed Iraq for years. Legislation permitting the reincorporation of former Ba'athists into public life was not passed until 2008, and even now, the Shiite-dominated administration continues to discriminate against Sunnis systematically.

⁵¹⁷ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 272.

To wit, those who have obtained position in Iraq have repeatedly sought to leverage their authority in order to advance decidedly illiberal and polarizing agendas. In particular, the Shiite-led government used its strong electoral showings in the January 2005 and December 2005 elections to advance policies that intensified the insurgency and further radicalized the government:

- It immediately invited a Shiite militia, the Badr Organization, to join Iraq's national security forces. The Badr corps was ultimately responsible for brutal atrocities committed against Sunnis by Shiites (in some cases, wearing government uniforms).
- The UIA stipulated that only an Iraqi with Islamist credibility and a close relationship to Sistani and the Shiite scholars based in Najaf could be an appropriate candidate for Prime Minister.
- Saddam Hussein's execution did not proceed according to Iraq's constitution (which requires the signature of both Iraq's vice-presidents), but on Nouri Al-Maliki's authority alone. The execution, moreover, was carried out on the day Sunnis begin to celebrate *Eid-al-Adha*, a period during which Iraqi law stipulates executions shall not take place. The rushed execution also ended, prematurely, Saddam Hussein's trial for the Anfal genocide, thereby depriving the Kurds of a similar catharsis.⁵¹⁸

A state that employs the authority of the government to advance the aims of one community at the expense of others (in contravention of existing legal protections) is,

⁵¹⁸ C.f. Peter Galbraith, *The End of Iraq*, 226-227.

by definition, tyrannical. The UIA-led government in Iraq fuelled the insurgency by utilizing powers ostensibly derived from popular consent to benefit select communities at high expense to others. Nor does this trend show any sign of abatement post-Surge, making political reconciliation and genuine progress toward functional government unlikely in the near term:

- the Maliki government has opposed the significant alterations to Iraq's de-Ba'athification laws Sunnis reasonably demand. (Even the 2008 law continues to limit Sunni influence over the country's administration, and was in fact opposed by most Sunni leaders for this reason).
- The National Police, an elite counterterrorism force made up of 85 % Shiite officers, was implicated in a "prison torture scandal," its victims, Sunni prisoners.⁵¹⁹ Recent reports indicate that security forces that report to Prime Minister Maliki continue to operate secret prisons in which torture is regularly utilized to extract confessions from Sunni Iraqis.⁵²⁰ A 2012 UN report on human rights violations in Iraq reported that there were 467 *reported* instances of prisoner/detainee torture in 2011 alone.⁵²¹
- The same government has repeatedly obstructed the integration of Sunnis fighting *AQI*, the Sons of Iraq, into the national security apparatus. Iraq's security services and its powerful Ministry of the Interior remain dominated by Shiite appointees

⁵¹⁹ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 516

⁵²⁰ Ned Parker, "The War We Left Behind," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No.2 (March/April 2012), 102-103.

⁵²¹ UNAMI Human Rights Office, "Report on Human Rights in Iraq," January 2011, 16-17. <http://unami.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=9hA1KMfch4I%3D&tabid=3174&language=en-US>

to the prejudice of Iraq's Kurdish and Sunni populations. As the Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction has notes, the ministry is "viewed by many as a protector of Shi'a interests" and "became notorious for discriminating by sect in its hiring practices."⁵²² Even paychecks have been, at times, distributed on the basis of ethnicity.

- In the lead up to the January 2009 provincial elections, Prime Minister Maliki used the power of his office to establish new militias in the Southern Shiite regions loyal to his Da'awa party in an effort to increase his influence in the Southern provinces. In addition to using the power of the national government to mobilize loyal voters in the provincial elections, he has systematically appointed Da'awa party officials to important administrative positions in the local governments to improve his party's prospects in 2009 and 2010.⁵²³
- In the lead-up to the 2010 national elections, Maliki supported a blatantly partisan decision by the Shiite-dominated Accountability and Justice Commission that disqualified 500 candidates standing for election, most of them Sunnis.⁵²⁴ One of the lists banned by the Commission was likely to caucus with Ayad Allawi after the election, what might have changed the ultimate result.⁵²⁵ In the end, while Allawi's list won two seats more than Maliki's party in the 2010 elections, Maliki was able to form a government after nine months of negotiations when the

⁵²² Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 516.

⁵²³ International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Provincial Elections: the Stakes," 27 January, 2009.

⁵²⁴ "Iraqi Commission Bars Nearly 500 Candidates," *NYT*, 14 January, 2010.

⁵²⁵ "Iraqi Commission Bars Nearly 500 Candidates," *NYT*, 14 January, 2010.

Kurdish Coalition threw its support behind him in exchange for political favors.⁵²⁶

The compromise called for Ayad Allawi to oversee the Defense Ministry. Prime Minister Maliki reneged on the commitment; much of the domestic security apparatus continues to report directly to him in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief.⁵²⁷ Since, he has only continued to centralize power. After the 2010 election, Maliki brought the Independent Higher Election Commission and the Anti-Corruption Commission under his cabinet's supervision, a move Iraq's pliant Supreme Court affirmed.⁵²⁸ As International Crisis Group has noted, "the judicial system (in particular the Federal Supreme Court, supposedly the arbiter of all constitutional disputes) has been highly vulnerable to political pressure."⁵²⁹ It has ruled in Maliki's favor on a number of controversial issues, giving his regime "a freer hand to govern as it pleases, unrestrained by institutional checks."⁵³⁰

- As the Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction has noted, civil servants of all varieties (from service providers to judges) have found it "difficult to shed their sectarian identity when on the job. For many, loyalties to sect or tribe competed with their willingness to serve the Iraqi state."⁵³¹ Moreover, as political and administrative authority has been devolved to the provinces and local governments, the same practices have been evident at the local levels. Tribal

⁵²⁶ International Crisis Group, "Iraq and the Kurds: Confronting Withdrawal Fears." 28 March 2011.

⁵²⁷ Ned Parker, "The War We Left Behind," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2012, 96-7.

⁵²⁸ Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights," Congressional Research Service 7-5700, April 19, 2012, 15.

⁵²⁹ International Crisis Group, "Failing Oversight: Iraq's Unchecked Government," 26 September, 2011, ii.

⁵³⁰ International Crisis Group, "Failing Oversight: Iraq's Unchecked Government," ii, 25.

⁵³¹ Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 514.

sheiks have used their authority to hire tribesmen or funnel government funds to friends though “Ghost” employees.⁵³² Today, Iraq is one of the most corrupt countries on the face of the planet; only Somalia, Afghanistan, and Myanmar rank lower on Transparency International’s 2010 list.⁵³³

- One day after U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, Prime Minister Maliki called for the arrest of Iraq’s Sunni Vice President, Tariq al-Hashimi, on charges that he had been involved in the death squads that terrorized the Shiite population at the height of the insurgency. The same day, he deployed tanks to the front yards of Sunni politicians.⁵³⁴ Hashimi fled to Kurdistan before leaving the country, deepening the country’s political crisis and raising fears that Iraq’s sectarian hatreds could reignite its civil war.⁵³⁵ As Ned Parker explained in an article subtitled “Welcome to the World’s Next Failed State,” the incident also underlined Maliki’s tyrannical proclivities: “No political figure, no matter how high ranking, now doubt Maliki’s ability to harness the law and the state to his ambitions.”⁵³⁶

⁵³² Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, 517.

⁵³³ <http://www.csmonitor.com/Business/Latest-News-Wires/2010/1027/Corrupt-countries-Iraq-Afghanistan-among-most-corrupt>

⁵³⁴ Ned Parker, “The War We Left Behind,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2012, 101.

⁵³⁵ NYT, “Arrest Order for Sunni Leader in Iraq Opens New Rift,” December 19, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/20/world/middleeast/iraqi-government-accuses-top-official-in-assassinations.html?pagewanted=all>

⁵³⁶ Ned Parker, “The War We Left Behind,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2012, 98.

An Illiberal Constitution and the Misuse of New Liberties

Far from quelling violence and unifying the country, elections and the constitutional process have been employed to secure sectarian interests to the detriment the national interest and the rule of law. Iraqis' new rights and liberties, moreover, have been abused in ways that have contributed to both political dysfunction and sectarian violence.

Sistani's brazen intrusion into the constitutional process is the best example of this. By way of religious proclamations, and his thoroughgoing personal influence, he has not only ensured Shiite control of Iraq along Islamist lines, but in addition to this, he managed ensure the constitution would support his vision of Iraq, not America's. Ayad Allawi's interim government was originally delegated the responsibility of writing Iraq's constitution in consultation with Bremer and CPA advisors. Recall that the Allawi government had been deliberately constituted of liberal-minded, generally secular and Western-leaning, Iraqis from a wide variety of backgrounds. Only one of its members could be characterized as an Islamist.⁵³⁷ As a result of Sistani's *fatwa* and the success of the Shiite umbrella group in the December 2005 election, the committee that ultimately wrote Iraq's Constitution was dominated by them.

Over and over, Sistani and Islamist Shiites embraced the outward trappings of constitutional democracy not from a commitment to its ideals, but because they provided a means to empower Iraq's majority faction and solidify a place for Islam in Iraq's founding document. The Najaf hierarchy even opposed, vociferously, the provisions

⁵³⁷ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, .

enacted to protect Iraq's minorities in the Transition Administrative Law (TAL), the document drafted by Iraqis on Bremer's insistence to govern the constitutional process once it became clear Western experts would not be writing the Constitution itself. The Shiite scholars opposed the TAL on the argument that its minority protections *contravened democratic (majoritarian) principles* and managed to insert a number of illiberal provisions.⁵³⁸ Larry Diamond memorably relays the frustration of Coalition officials; their efforts to build a modern and moderate government in Iraq were frustrated again and again—by sectarians arguing for power on democratic grounds!

For the fourth or fifth time—I was losing count—the United States was finding itself on what appeared to be the *less* democratic side of an argument with Iraqis over the transitional procedures. Sistani had called for an elected constitution-making body. Bremer said an appointed body would do. Iraqis (and many CPA officials) wanted to conduct direct elections for local governments. Bremer and top governance officials vetoed them. The CPA proposed an opaque, convoluted, process for choosing a transitional government [the provincial selection caucuses], and Sistani, along with many Iraqis, again demanded direct elections. Now the CPA and the Governing Council were saying to Iraqis—and I myself was saying—Here is your wonderful interim constitution, and a great many Iraqis were responding, Don't we have a voice in shaping the rules that will govern us for the next eighteen months and will guide the making of our permanent constitution? Beyond the exigencies of time and practicality, there was no good answer.⁵³⁹

Contra Diamond, there was a good answer. He, Bremer, and the President were trying to build in Iraq not so much a democracy, as a liberal constitutional regime. Policymakers sensed as much, but the extent to which liberalism and popular government are separate things—held together in the West by indispensable sacred opinions are *mores* that do not spring into existence with elections—was not clearly appreciated. Had it been

⁵³⁸ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 222.

⁵³⁹ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 198.

recognized, it would have been impossible for policymakers to profess a grand intention to build a liberal constitutional regime in Iraq while calling for elections, the elaboration of a constitution, and the transfer of authority to Iraqis as soon as humanly possible. The rhetorical appeal of majoritarian democratic principles, moreover, was overwhelming and it was wrested from the Coalition by a faction with self-serving and illiberal intentions. Time and time again, the CPA failed to hold its ground when their efforts to build a limited constitutional regime came into conflict with the goals of Islamists who were proudly invoking the rhetoric associated with popular government.

Ayatollah al-Sistani's organization went on to lead a public relations battle against the TAL, one that began immediately after its passage.⁵⁴⁰ Although the TAL had satisfied most of Sistani's demands, the section of the TAL that raised a problem, 61(c), stipulated that a 2/3 vote against the constitution in three of Iraq's eighteen provinces during the ratification plebiscite would constitute a rejection of the entire document. The Kurds fought for the provision because it would give them an effective veto over the constitution as a whole insofar as they dominated precisely three provinces. Kurdish negotiators slipped the provision into the TAL at the very last minute, the Shiite delegation apparently failing to understand its significance at the time.⁵⁴¹ In the end, the *jihad* against the TAL failed against the more urgent background of rising violence in Iraq; its provisions did, in the end, guide the elaboration of Iraq's constitution.

⁵⁴⁰ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 185-186.

⁵⁴¹ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 175; cf., Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, .

At the convention itself, 61(c) ensured cooperation between the Shiites and the Kurds, but not toward the establishment of a national compact. On this, commentators are unanimous. There was no effort by any party to build a united, pluralistic and tolerant constitutional regime. Every faction acted in its own interest, which yielded a compromise document through and through. As Ali Allawi sums up, “The Iraqi constitution of 2005 was not the national compact that many had thought necessary and desirable, but a document arising from a series of political deals.”⁵⁴² The deals that were struck were between the Kurds and the Shiites, and the document met the dominant concerns of both factions, at the expense of Iraq’s Sunni population. Sunnis had boycotted the 2005 election—and were, thus, underrepresented at the ensuing convention—nor could they muster a 2/3 vote in three provinces. Far from accomplishing its purpose in the eyes of American policymakers—it is not a unifying and liberal document, nor did the end of the occupation its adoption portended affect slow the rate of violence—Iraq’s constitution permanently advantages the partisans who dominated its enactment.

- At Shiite insistence, Islam is the country’s official religion, “no law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam,” and a provision for judicial review by a committee of “experts in Islamic jurisprudence and law” is enshrined in the nation’s founding document. As Peter Galbraith has pointed out, in this, Iraq’s constitution bears more resemblance to Iran’s than to America’s.⁵⁴³

⁵⁴² Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 413.

⁵⁴³ Galbraith, *The End of Iraq*, 197.

Solidifying formal recognition of Islam's role, and the scholars' authority to interpret its requirements, was reportedly one of Sistani's priorities.⁵⁴⁴

- Insofar as power is devolved to the provinces in Iraq to significant extent, and the constitution's protections for individuals and minorities applicable only to the national government's enumerated powers, the clauses that bear the most resemblance to a bill of rights (and which were championed by Bremer and the Bush administration) mean next to nothing in practice.⁵⁴⁵ In the terms of American Constitutional law, the protections for individuals and minorities in Iraq do not apply to the provinces or local governments, and they have not been incorporated. This was deliberate. The Shiite provinces in the South have every constitutional authority to enact laws that violate ostensibly "protected" civil liberties, as indeed many routinely do by having replaced, to varying degrees, Iraq's civil code with *sharia* law.⁵⁴⁶ To wit, "honor" remains a mitigating defense to a murder charge in Iraq according to the country's criminal code.⁵⁴⁷
- Protections for vulnerable minorities are next to non-existent in the public civil sphere. Before the outbreak of war, Iraq was home to 1.4 million Christians. Violence targeting Christians is still widespread, however, and has led many Christians to leave Iraq or move North to Kurdistan. By 2012, Iraq's Christian population had dwindled to less than 500,000.⁵⁴⁸ Honor killings remain an issue

⁵⁴⁴ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 231.

⁵⁴⁵ Galbraith, *The End of Iraq*, 200.

⁵⁴⁶ Galbraith, *The End of Iraq*, 212.

⁵⁴⁷ UNAMI Human Rights Office, "Report on Human Rights in Iraq," 25.

⁵⁴⁸ Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights," Congressional Research Service 7-5700, April 19, 2012, 28.

in Iraq, though the number of women affected is nearly impossible to determine.⁵⁴⁹ International audiences were horrified when news surfaced that a dozen (and perhaps as many as 90) young male Iraqis were killed for dressing and grooming themselves in a Western “emo” style. After the Interior Ministry denounced the subculture as Satanic and encouraged community police to stamp it out, Shiite Iraqis stoned the young men to death and circulated lists identifying those who would be next.⁵⁵⁰ A leaflet containing 24 names included this warning: “We strongly warn you, to all the obscene males and females, if you will not leave this filthy work within four days the punishment of God will descend upon you at the hand of the Mujahideen.”⁵⁵¹

- The Kurds looked at the Constitution as an opportunity to solidify their independence, not as an opportunity to build a document reflecting (and solidifying) a national compact. Arguably, they achieved more at the convention than any other group. Diamond calls the concessions they won a “remarkable political victory.”⁵⁵² They include radical decentralization, the promise of a referendum on the status of Kirkuk (a disputed city), limited regional authority over the development of new oil resources, and the incorporation of the *pesh merga* (the Kurdish militia) into the Iraqi armed forces. Most of these issues remain

⁵⁴⁹ UNAMI Human Rights Office, “Report on Human Rights in Iraq,” 25-26.

⁵⁵⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/10/us-iraq-emo-killings-idUSBRE8290CY20120310>; <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/03/10/199751.html>

⁵⁵¹ http://worldnews.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2012/03/10/10634539-iraqi-teens-stoned-to-death-for-wearing-emo-clothes

⁵⁵² Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 174.

important factors Iraq's intractable political paralysis today.⁵⁵³ The Kurds refuse to compromise on these provisions because they guarantee de facto Kurdish autonomy; moreover, they are perceived as essential to the preparation of any future bid for complete independence.

- The Sunnis, in turn, are demanding revisions to the Constitution they did not have opportunity to affect in 2005. The problem: the alterations the Sunnis are demanding would erode the very provisions the Kurds fought hardest for, and absent which they would never have ratified the constitution. Today, some are concerned Kurdish-Arab tensions—over territory (especially the status of Kirkuk) and over oil—could provoke new civil discord. Documents released by WikiLeaks revealed American commanders in the region fear that long-simmering tensions in the North may turn violent when U.S. forces begin to withdraw.⁵⁵⁴ International Crisis Group has devoted two recent reports to the same concern.⁵⁵⁵
- The Sunnis, who boycotted the 2005 elections and therefore had limited influence over the committee that drafted the constitution, rejected it in staggering numbers when it was put to popular referendum on 15 October, 2005. Whereas the three Kurdish governorates approved the constitution by a 99-1% margin, with the nine Shiite governorates voting “yes” each in proportions exceeding 95%, every Sunni-dominated governorate voted “no,” narrowly missing the threshold

⁵⁵³ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 175.

⁵⁵⁴ Michael Gordon and Andrew Lehen, “Tensions still High Along the Kurdish-Arab Line,” *The New York Times*. 23 October, 2010.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/24/world/middleeast/24kurds.html>

⁵⁵⁵ cf. International Crisis Group, “Trouble Along the Trigger Line,” 8 July, 2009; and International Crisis Group, “Iraq and the Kurds: The High-Stakes Hydrocarbon Gambit,” April 19, 2012.

required to defeat the constitution altogether. Anbar Province rejected the constitution 97-3%; Salahaddin, 81-19%; with Nineveh (a mixed province, 60% Sunni Arab) barely failing to muster two-thirds opposition at 54-46%.⁵⁵⁶

In other words, the constitution is a compromise document acceptable to the Shiite and Kurds *only* because it permits each faction to live in relatively autonomous regions, and in radically different ways. As Peter Galbraith plainly puts it, “they have made a deal: the Kurds would let the Shiites run Arab Iraq in exchange for Baghdad not interfering in a de facto independent Kurdistan.”⁵⁵⁷ The Bush administration lobbied Kurdish leaders to support Ayad Allawi instead of the Shiite bloc in 2005, but to absolutely no avail. American officials argued that by supporting Allawi, the more secular Kurdish bloc would be able to build a new, modern, Iraq. The Kurds, however, were not at all interested in a new Iraq; they preferred to defend the autonomy of Kurdistan and so struck a deal with the Shiites that permitted them to do just that. Indeed, on the day of the January 2005 elections, the Kurds held a separate but simultaneous (non-binding) vote on independence; two million Kurds participated with 98% voting in favor of independence.⁵⁵⁸ The Kurds chose the same side faced with the same choice in the wake of the 2010 elections; this time, their support made the difference and continued Maliki’s reign.

Iraq’s new political openness has also been a mixed blessing. The dismantling of Saddam Hussein’s fear society and intelligence apparatus in favor of new personal liberties had

⁵⁵⁶ cf. Galbraith, *The End of Iraq*, 204.

⁵⁵⁷ Galbraith, *The End of Iraq*, 188.

⁵⁵⁸ Galbraith, *The End of Iraq*, 171.

unanticipated and pernicious consequences, contributing not a little to Iraq's radicalization. The end of systematic censorship precipitated a flood of Islamist literature from Iran on the one hand, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, on the other. The wide availability of the most extreme Salafi and Iranian propaganda no doubt contributed to the increasing fanaticism of Iraq's Sunni and Shiite populations. Suddenly, preachers were allowed to say anything, and they marshaled the authority of Islam against the Coalition and to fan the flames of sectarian hatreds. New press freedoms, an underdeveloped concern for objectivity, and a dearth of libel laws, meanwhile, permitted an entire industry devoted to fanning the flames of sectarian hatreds to emerge under the name "news." Saddam Hussein prohibited independent media outlets outright. Within months of liberation, every faction had its own propaganda instrument.⁵⁵⁹

Similarly, the explosion of satellite and internet access made it possible for Iraqis to get their news *about Iraq* not from sources set up by the CPA, but from *jihadi* websites as well as television stations dedicated to vilifying anything and everything American.

Organizations like *Al-Jazeera*, *Al-Arabiya*, and the Iranian-backed *Al-Alem* (conceived expressly to influence Iraq's Shiite) fuelled the insurgency for the sake of ratings. Yet another uneasy question is thus raised: would it have been possible to win Iraqis' hearts and minds while ceding the power to inform (and to misinform) the population to elements with a clear interest in thwarting America's attempt to build a stable constitutional regime? Can a liberal democracy be built by liberal means?

⁵⁵⁹ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 154.

SECOND PART

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY'S REQUIREMENTS AND IMPEDIMENTS

CHAPTER V

THE DEPENDENCE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY ON SACRED OPINIONS AND SOCIAL HABITS

For all the discussion of regime change, it is startling the term was so badly misunderstood. Regime means something more than the institutional structure of a particular government—it is not enough to ask “who rules,” nor even “in the service of whom” and “according to what rules and structures,” though these are no doubt important questions. One cannot understand a given regime without understanding how the institutional structure of government is connected to the purpose for which it exists. Ostensibly similar institutional structures can be employed to very different ends: to make possible every individual’s self-directed pursuit of happiness, to conquer the known world, to bring about an equality to conditions, to instantiate God’s law, etc. These guiding purposes, moreover, are intimately related to the means by which a given regime achieves its objective—through public participation and love of country, through the encouragement of productive behavior, by the power of government and the fear it can inspire, thanks to a common dedication to shared religious convictions or their enforcement by violence and fear, by the separation of the moral and political spheres, etc. The regime, then, is more than a collection of laws and institutions. It includes these things. But as importantly, a regime is defined by the way of life its institutions exist to

protect and promote. Its success ultimately depends not simply on the structures and laws alone, then, but on the spirit that guides and animates their application. Whether a regime achieves its professed purpose therefore depends most importantly on factors external to its rules, institutions, and constitution: above all, the character of the people.

No doubt, a regime—its constitution, its leading men, its educational infrastructure, its political discourse—affect the character of the people who inhabit it. But other influences external to the regime often play an even larger role. Let us say, with Samuel Huntington, that an individual's most deeply ingrained opinions and social habits are in some sense an artifact of, and constitute his membership in, a community that is generally broader than a single state—his civilization: “a civilization is thus the highest cultural grouping of a people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species.”⁵⁶⁰ As Angelo Codevilla elaborates, a civilization “is a package of habits and precepts that not only affects the way people live but to some extent defines what it means to be happy”; “the world's major civilizations,” meanwhile, “are more or less coterminous with its major religions and, much more roughly, with its major races.”⁵⁶¹ Put another way, a civilization *is* the authoritative moral and aesthetic convictions its members share: communal dedication to notions of right and wrong, good and evil, noble and base, decent and obscene, permitted and impermissible, beautiful and ugly—judgments in the context of which an individual conceives of his happiness and the sort of life it is worth aspiring to, the judgments absent

⁵⁶⁰ Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* (Summer, 1993), 24.

⁵⁶¹ Angelo Codevilla, *The Character of Nations*, (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 50.

which any such consideration is bound to be empty. Civilizations provide “pattern[s] of life.” Isaiah Berlin conveys the magnitude of the concept this way:

The history not only of thought, but of consciousness, opinion, action too, of morals, politics, aesthetics, is to a large degree a history of dominant models. Whenever you look at any particular civilization, you will find that its most characteristic writings and other cultural products reflect a particular pattern of life...⁵⁶²

By the totality of its constituent influences, a civilization thus sets the moral boundaries within which, the standards according to which, and the ideals for the sake of which, people live. Most of the time, a civilization’s pattern of life remains more or less stable across generations. This is certainly not to suggest every member of every civilization agrees completely on every important matter all the time. But they more or less agree. Those who do not are the outcasts.

What, then, is the relationship between civilization and political regime? If “regime” refers to the overall political organization of a social body—including the end to which it is organized and the manner in which that organization is sustained—“civilization” refers to the collection of influences that are usually (but not always) extraneous to the regime itself, influences that have antecedently formed the subject matter, which is to say the people, the regime seeks to organize in a certain way. These guiding opinions and social practices can only be changed against considerable resistance. Regimes can exert a steady and potentially transformative effect over the character of the citizenry; regimes can even affect the tenor of the civilization they overlap, or parts thereof. But civilization-defining forces, especially religion, almost always exert a stronger influence on a people’s

⁵⁶² Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 2.

social character, thereby affecting the sort of regimes suited to given peoples, and the manner in which this or that set of laws and institutional arrangements will operate in a given time or place. As Codevilla notes, “Regimes do not spring up with particular sets of characteristics just anywhere on the planet. Strong as the influence of regimes on people’s lives is, the influence of civilizations tends to be greater. Civilizations set the bounds within which regimes exercise their powers over human habits.”⁵⁶³

It follows that regimes and civilizations are more and less distinct. Some peoples will be more amenable, and others less, to various forms of overarching political organization. This is true because the social habits and beliefs ingrained by different civilizations support and repel systems of laws in different ways. This means that a regime will only achieve its purpose where the citizenry is, by the totality of the civilization-level influences at work, morally disposed to bring about an identity of the regime’s political arrangement and its professed purpose. As a corollary, the degree to which the social habits and beliefs that define a given civilization mandate a specific species of political regime (and discourage the establishment of others) varies across civilizations. Some civilizations have proven very flexible, capable of various modes of political organization; others have proven quite inflexible. Here again, Huntington and Codevilla agree. As the latter puts it, no civilization has “given greater evidence of malleability than the Japanese, who, within a century after their leaders’ decision to abandon feudalism and isolation, were led

⁵⁶³ Angelo Codevilla, *The Character of Nations*, 50.

rather easily to adopt three ways of life vastly different in tone and substance: obedient pupils, aggressive militarists, and single-minded producers”⁵⁶⁴⁵⁶⁵

In some cases, opinions elemental to the civilization can become so strong as to make difficult or impossible certain ways of organizing society. Islam may well fall at the end of the spectrum opposite the Japanese with respect to flexibility. That Islam’s commandments go so far beyond man’s spiritual relationship with God, to the point of mandating a particular legal code—a way of organizing society revealed by, and mandated by, God that is to be instantiated by the temporal authorities—necessarily gives rigidity to peoples where the population is wholeheartedly committed to those commands. To dwell on the example of Islam, as interpreted by leading Salafi voices today, in addition to a very specific political regime, laws regulating minute details of hygiene, dress, and cuisine are dictated to the political community on the authority of God. Where these views have been internalized at full strength, an attempt to build a regime that departs from Islam’s mandate—not just constitutional democracy, but as the latter half of the twentieth century well demonstrated, liberal mixed regimes held together by nationalism and socialist utopias as well—have met with considerable resistance in the Muslim world (a subject considered at length in Chapters 7 and 8).

⁵⁶⁴ Angelo Codevilla, *The Character of Nations*, 51.

⁵⁶⁵ Huntington seems more or less to agree: “While Asians became increasingly assertive as a result of economic development, Muslims in massive numbers were simultaneously turning toward Islam as a source of identity, meaning, stability, legitimacy, development, power, and hope, hope epitomized in the slogan ‘Islam is the solution.’” Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 109.

In sum, some civilizations are flexible enough to accommodate a number of different political regimes easily; others are hospitable to some, and inhospitable to others. Reigning patterns of life *can* close off political possibilities from the standpoint of statecraft. This is not to say transformation is impossible in the more difficult cases; it is to say that changing a regime where influences external to the regime itself are very strong also requires affecting civilization-level influences. As we will see, Atatürk understood this vis a vis Turkey; as we have seen, American policymakers understood it less well vis a vis Iraq.

The regime's dependence on the character of its citizenry has, in the past, been well appreciated even if it is not today. Machiavelli, for example, makes much of the fact the Roman Republic had in fact disintegrated even before Caesar crossed the Rubicon.⁵⁶⁶ Its constitutional arrangement—the divisions and tensions that kept Rome free—were no longer operating more than a century before Caesar's ascent. Machiavelli explains that moral decline in Rome made possible the rise of a tyrant by constitutional means—the organizational features of the regime (its offices and institutions) employed to demolish it (in terms of the regime's guiding purpose: the citizens' liberties and their patriotic participation in government). Once the *mores* graven into Rome's Republican hearts no longer governed Romans, nor as a result, Roman politics, Rome ceased to be the republic

⁵⁶⁶ Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, Harvey Mansfield trans., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 18, 80.

of Cato and Coriolanus and the rise of a Caesar was inevitable: “where [the people] are corrupt, well ordered laws do not help...”⁵⁶⁷

In this context, it is easy to understand what Rousseau meant by his observation that peoples have two founding moments: that which makes them a people with a certain social character, and that which gives them laws suitable to their temperament. The second type of lawgiver aims to give a people laws: a constitution graven in bronze and immortalized by political poetry, suited to the people’s moral temperament, and in the best cases, one that contains provisions for sustaining the noblest aspects of the people’s character going forward. The legislator of the higher order—the one who forms a people’s character, who builds a civilization, in the first place—is much more rare. This species of lawgiver is the source of the most important *mores* and sacred beliefs: the laws and customs graven into the hearts of men upon which, in Rousseau’s words, “the success of all the others depends.” Rousseau stresses in the *Social Contract* and elsewhere that “morals, customs, and above all opinions... form the immovable Keystone” of any regime.⁵⁶⁸ From the examples of this higher order lawgiver Rousseau elucidates—Numa, Moses, and Lycurgas—it is clear he believes religious beliefs are generally the most important element of a people’s ideational makeup.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁷ Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 48.

⁵⁶⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract*, II.12.

⁵⁶⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, chapter 2.

Hamas and Illiberal Democracy

It follows, then, that democratic laws and participatory institutions will not yield liberal government everywhere; it takes a liberal citizenry. The contemporary relevance of Republican Rome's decline is demonstrated by recent democratization experiments in Iraq and beyond. No single event better demonstrates the truth of Huntington's 1993 insight that "in the Arab world... Western democracy strengthens anti-Western political forces" than the 2006 elections in Gaza.⁵⁷⁰ Once free and fair elections propelled Hamas to power, Islamists emboldened by their victory at the polls immediately began consolidating their power to establish a new political order and route their more moderate political opponents. No part of the public bureaucracy has maintained its independence. Hamas' armed wing, the Matyr 'Izz-al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, used the rift with the Palestinian Authority created by the election to transform itself from "underground guerilla organization into a uniformed military force" that today exerts a virtual monopoly on the means of violence in Gaza.⁵⁷¹ Gaza's internal security forces are today more efficient and more brutal than ever before; they, too, are entirely beholden to the Hamas leadership.

Hamas routinely uses the coercive power of government to suppress political dissent and route support for its chief political rival, Fatah. It has achieved this by brutal means. Security forces have been used to intimidate and even kill Fatah members and their supporters, to seize the property of political opponents, to take charge of courts and

⁵⁷⁰ Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (Summer, 1993), 32.

⁵⁷¹ International Crisis Group, "Ruling Palestine I: Gaza Under Hamas," March 13, 2008, 6.

hospitals, and to raid and often close altogether pro-Fatah radio stations and newspapers.⁵⁷² Meanwhile, government ministries were purged of administrators affiliated with Fatah. In a word, Hamas leveraged its electoral victory to completely transform Gaza's regime, with terrible consequences for its long-suffering inhabitants.

As International Crisis Group sums up, "the new order came at significant cost to ordinary Gazans."⁵⁷³ The rule of law in Gaza, never a shining example of due process and respect for minority rights, verges today (again, thanks to elections) on non-existent. After Hamas' electoral at the polls, lawyers were denied access to clients; many of those accused of fanciful crimes for political reasons were only released after spending months in prison, the payment of bail, and on promise not to discuss their imprisonment or seek treatment for injuries sustained during their incarceration in government hospitals.

Police summons were backed by threat of maiming: "if you don't come, say goodbye to your knee." Gaza's dysfunctional court system was, for a time, replaced with religious rule enforced summarily by police on the guidance of ad-hoc religious councils. When the court system was reestablished, it was reestablished with a contingent of newly appointed, mostly Islamist, judges. Senior Hamas operatives and Gaza's jurists openly assert their desire to see "the courts... apply Sharia law."⁵⁷⁴

Meanwhile, no effort was spared to transform the public bureaucracy and the religious sphere it controls in light of Hamas' radical interpretation of Islamic law. Dissent was suppressed down to the level of individual mosques—"about 300 preachers, 25 percent of

⁵⁷² International Crisis Group, "Ruling Palestine I," 9-11.

⁵⁷³ International Crisis Group, "Ruling Palestine I," 10.

⁵⁷⁴ International Crisis Group, "Ruling Palestine I," 10-15.

the total” were “dismissed from their mosques, sometimes by force”—as Hamas operatives sought to exert tighter control over Islamic practice. Unsurprisingly, the preachers who remain have reported the further politicization of the pulpit. To this same end, schools must today devote more time to teaching a more fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. Observers agree the practice of Islam has grown noticeably more conservative, and is increasingly enforced by the coercive authority of the state.

One preacher complained that “Hamas is turning a religion of tolerance into a religion of terrorists.”⁵⁷⁵ For its part, Hamas counts what it calls a “morality campaign that [has] cleansed Gaza of alcohol and prostitutes” among its great successes.⁵⁷⁶ Opponents of Hamas concede that with the election of Hamas, Gaza had “‘enter[ed] a new era’” in which it was in the grip of ‘single-party rule.’”⁵⁷⁷ Crisis Group concluded in the summer of 2008 that, “the public appears to have understood that at this point there is no space for political opposition”; or as one intellectual they cited put it, “There is nothing in Gaza except Hamas.”⁵⁷⁸ Nor are Gazans likely even to have the opportunity to remove their governors by regular vote any time soon. Since 2006, three sets of elections have been cancelled either by Hamas or the Palestinian authority.⁵⁷⁹ Hamas seems intent to prove

⁵⁷⁵ International Crisis Group, “Ruling Palestine I,” 14-16.

⁵⁷⁶ International Crisis Group, “Ruling Palestine I,” 21.

⁵⁷⁷ International Crisis Group, “Round Two in Gaza,” 11 September, 2008, 7.

⁵⁷⁸ International Crisis Group, “Round Two in Gaza,” 7.

⁵⁷⁹ “Under threat from all sides” *Economist*. 12 August, 2010.

<http://www.economist.com/node/16793370>

Bernard Lewis' quip about the character of Islamists' enthusiasm for democracy: "One man (men only), one vote, once."⁵⁸⁰

As though things were not bad enough, around 2009, ultra radical groups—angry that Hamas has neither fully instituted *sharia* law nor launched a new *intifada* against Israel—began to splinter from the leadership to found new violent *jihadi* organizations.⁵⁸¹ While estimates of their number vary from 500 to 5000 (a leader of one of the groups puts the number at 11,000),⁵⁸² it does not take an army to exert a powerful political effect by way of terrorism. In addition to high profile strikes in Egypt, the new *jihadi* groups have actively sought confrontations with Hamas, some of which have turned bloody. Hamas not only routinely imprisons and tortures their new rivals; they've used the authority of the government to crush them, in some cases killing as many as two dozen in a single engagement.⁵⁸³ So much for the giddy expectations that elections might well save Gaza by forcing Hamas to become a responsible civic-minded organization! In fact, Hamas has governed badly, but not badly enough for a small and assertive minority intent to further radicalize and destabilize all of Gaza. Their complaints about the insufficiently Islamist nature of Hamas as governing entity have had the further political effect of pulling Hamas in the direction of their ideology. As International Crisis Group explains,

The significance of these groups comes not from their military capabilities but from the constraints they impose on Hamas: they are an ideological challenge to the movement, not simply from without but also, and more dangerously, from within; they appeal to members of Hamas's military

⁵⁸⁰ Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam* (New York: Random House, 2004), 112.

⁵⁸¹ International Crisis Group, "Radical Islam in Gaza," 29 March 2011, 7.

⁵⁸² International Crisis Group, "Radical Islam in Gaza," 13-14.

⁵⁸³ International Crisis Group, "Radical Islam in Gaza," 113.

wing, a powerful constituency... by criticizing Hamas for failing to fight Israel and to implement Islamic law, they exert pressure toward greater militancy and Islamisation.⁵⁸⁴

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Gaza's experiment with democracy has failed. Elections can be held anywhere. But liberal government only results when the electorate is, for the most part, made up of voters touched by a host of durable liberalizing influences. Nor is Gaza unique. As Elie Kedourie has shown decisively, attempts to establish constitutional democracy in the Middle East have been frequent over the course of the twentieth century; *coups d'état*, and authoritarian counterrevolutions have, unfortunately, been equally common. Iraq's first attempt at parliamentary government (long before Saddam Hussein), as well as similar endeavors in Syria, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, and the Sudan all failed on short order—as a result of sectarian hatreds, bloated military apparatuses, and totalitarian ideologies inhospitable to liberal democracy including pan-Arabism, communism, and Islamic fundamentalism. As Kedourie sums up his landmark study,

This survey of what might be called the varieties of democratic experience in the Arab world cannot but give a dismal impression. This is because the successive attempts to institute constitutional and parliamentary government were generally made in good faith. Their realization was believed to be practicable and to lead, moreover, to the prosperity and happiness of the countries which adopted them. Regardless, however, of aspirations and good intentions, the failure was uniform...

To what may this fatality be ascribed? First and foremost, no doubt, to the fact that these ideas of constitutionalism and representation belonged to, and had their rise in, a political tradition and in political arrangements very different from those to which these countries had been long accustomed.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁴ International Crisis Group, "Radical Islam in Gaza," 5.

⁵⁸⁵ Eli Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 103.

As he puts it earlier in the same work, “the age in which these events happened was not a liberal age.”⁵⁸⁶

Guiding Ideals and Founding Documents

Where constitutional democracy works to promote liberal goals—where it promotes stability, durably establishes the rule of law and equality before it, to the end of protecting the rights of individuals and minority—it is the fruit of a rare and delicate union: the moral character of a people and their democratic regime are mutually dependent, *vital co-requisites*. Nascent America is an illustrative example. It is both true that America’s Constitution would not have been suitable for any but a morally upright—in the Founders’ words, a “Christian”—people (as Adams and Washington argued, and even Hamilton later came to appreciate); and that reverence for America’s Constitution and founding principles has helped to form, and supported the endurance of, a citizenry capable of governing itself according to liberal democratic principles. In other words, Americans were favorably disposed to moderate constitutional government from the beginning (for a constellation of historical, geographical and religious/ideational reasons); at the same time, however, America’s constitutional soul, an indispensable support for the endurance of our form of government and admirable way of life, is today to an important extent rooted in, and sustained by, a parchment document and our collective reverence for the ideals it represents.

⁵⁸⁶ Eli Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture*, 87.

Abraham Lincoln understood this. As he put it in a debate with Stephen Douglas in 1858, “public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed. He who moulds public sentiment is greater [or “goes deeper”] than he who makes statutes.”⁵⁸⁷ It is a vital point, underappreciated today, Lincoln returns to again and again: political regimes depend on, cannot function as designed without, enduring sacred commitments that are in turn nurtured and sustained by the political poetry and foundational laws of the regime, often as celebrated by the rhetoric of its greatest leaders. Elsewhere, he calls this a people’s “political religion.”⁵⁸⁸ In America, it consists of the ideals expressed in Declaration of Independence, reified by popular reverence for the Ante-Bellum Constitution, and memorialized again in the Gettysburg Address. Of the United States, Lincoln thus opined:

Without the *Constitution* and the *Union*, we could not have attained the result [free government]; but even these, are not the primary cause of our great prosperity. There is something back of these, entwining itself more closely about the human heart. That something, is the principle of ‘Liberty to all’....

The *expression* of that principle, in our Declaration of Independence, was most happy, and fortunate. *Without* this, as well as *with* it, we could have declared our independence of Great Britain; but *without* it, we could not, I think, have secured our free government...⁵⁸⁹

On Lincoln’s metaphor, the principles of equality and liberty for all are the “apple of gold”; the Union and the Constitution constitute its frame, “the *picture of silver*.” He goes

⁵⁸⁷ Harold Holzer ed, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 75.

⁵⁸⁸ Abraham Lincoln, “Address to the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield,” 27 January, 1838.

⁵⁸⁹ Quoted in Harry Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 331-332.

on to explain “the picture was made, not to *conceal*, or destroy the apple; but to *adorn*, and *preserve* it.”⁵⁹⁰

Only in light of the recognition that liberal democracy depends on a widespread commitment to the ideals espoused in the Declaration of Independence as much as the Constitutional arrangement designed to protect them does one fully understand the magnitude of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Steven Douglas argued that democracy was committed, at its core and above all else, to the sovereignty of the people. The principle of popular sovereignty, moreover, permitted—no, *entitled*—the people of a state or a territory to determine for themselves whether slavery ought to be protected or prohibited within its boundaries. The Confederacy, moreover, claimed a right to secede from the Union on ostensibly democratic grounds: it was withdrawing its consent, previously freely given, to be governed according to the institutions established by the U.S. Constitution.

Lincoln, in contrast, understood that liberal democracy is indistinguishable from tyranny where the sovereign people, the majority, is free to charge itself with determining which inhabitants count as people and which do not. Lincoln argued that liberal democracy is impossible absent the devotion to a common set of sacred principles that helps buttress a kind of collective self-control. That all men are created equal is the most important of these; it moderates the use the majority permits itself to make of its tremendous legislative authority. Lincoln further recognized that America’s constitutional arrangement would cease to produce free government if the principles of the Declaration were permitted to

⁵⁹⁰ Quoted in Harry Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided*, 332.

erode, a danger he believed *Dred Scott* and the expansion of slavery into the territories on popular sovereignty grounds represented. Thus, the repeal of the Missouri compromise not only threw down an important legal barrier to slavery. More important, as Harry Jaffa explains, “was the implicit repeal of the moral condemnation” of slavery the compromise had expressed.⁵⁹¹ The war was worth fighting not simply to assert the permanency of the Union; above all, it was worth fighting to rededicate the nation to the truths of the Declaration.

First Sources

But what is the first source of those ideals? And why did they prevail in America? No student of history would assert that the principles so beautifully articulated in the Declaration of Independence sprung, unfertilized, from Jefferson’s head. The words of the Declaration did not *create* the sentiments they so beautifully expressed. Far from it: Encomnia to universal equality, to liberty, and to the rights of man suffuse state constitutions, some of which pre-date 1776. Not legislators, then, but the constellation of (not always altogether compatible) new ideas put forth by the thinkers of three intellectual revolutions—the Enlightenment, the Reformation, and European Romanticism—constitute the modern West’s original character-imparting founders and lawgivers. They crafted our tolerant, liberal, democratic souls and in the process built a civilization, Western Civilization. Though we do not always realize it, the laws upon which our Constitutional arrangement depends are, in a sense, airy nothings—opinions, ideas,

⁵⁹¹ Harry Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided*, 296.

habits, and social practices imbued by citizens with the air, simply by living in the regime (so long, that is, as the regime itself remains healthy and confident). First advanced by our great philosophers, then reified by our regimes' great founders and the legal strictures they established, they rely for their continued transmission on our system of education, our political discourse, our shared moral and political values as taught in the home.

Tocqueville makes a similar point with particular emphasis in *L'Ancien Regime* (1856). He argues that the political revolutions of Eighteenth Century Europe and in America *could not* have occurred in the Fifteenth for the simple reason that the ideas and social practices so essential to liberal democracy were not yet capable of taking hold in men's minds; Europeans and Americans were not ready for democracy because they had not internalized a suitable moral character. As Tocqueville explains, "[f]or doctrines of this kind [the natural rights of man] to lead to revolutions, certain changes must already have taken place in the living conditions, customs, and *mores* of a nation and prepared men's minds for the reception of new ideas."⁵⁹² He goes on to point out that the opinion that lies at the root of liberal democracy, and which seems so self-evidently true to us today—that all men are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights—is a truth, or sacred opinion, that will be for many peoples in many times impossible to accept:

there are periods in a nation's life when men differ from each other so profoundly that any notion of 'the same law for all' seems to them preposterous. But there are other periods when it is enough to dangle before their eyes a picture, however indistinct and remote, of such a law and they promptly grasp its meaning and hasten to acclaim it.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹² Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime*, Stuart Gilbert trans., (New York: Anchor Publishing, 1955), 13.

⁵⁹³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime*, 13.

For Europe, the precondition of the people's receptivity to these opinions, and the form of government based upon it, was the *popularization* of Enlightenment ideas—not only their wise articulation, but as important, their widespread acceptance.

Tocqueville devotes a chapter of *L'Ancien Regime* to the near-universal revolution in the social consciousness of Euro-American peoples that made constitutional democracy possible in the West. When Tocqueville famously declares in *Democracy in America* that the democratic revolution sweeping Europe is “irresistible,” he is referring to the inevitable political impact of Europe's new political consciousness.⁵⁹⁴ Locke taught that human beings had natural rights; Voltaire, that superstitions promulgated by the Church had to be jettisoned in favor of the free human intellect; Rousseau, that “sacred” conviction that legislative authority resides in the people; Spinoza, that the Gospels properly understood demand liberal government. If the Enlightenment's great thinkers did not agree about everything, Tocqueville is right that their basic motivation and thrust, certainly as synthesized for a popular audience then and since, can be boiled down to this: “what [they] wanted was to replace the complex of traditional customs governing the social order of the day by simple, elementary rules deriving from the exercise of the human reason and natural law.”⁵⁹⁵ The Reformation pulled the West in the same direction, arguing on the basis of scripture that individuals are entitled to a personal relationship with God according to their own lights.

⁵⁹⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 400; cf. 6, 7.

⁵⁹⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime*, 139.

The reason they succeeded, he argues, is that men of letters popularized liberalism's founding tenets. Intellectuals like Voltaire and Diderot were public celebrities. Rousseau's *Julie* had outsold every book in print, save perhaps the Bible; his *Social Contract* boldly denied that any government to which the people do not consent can be legitimate. More important, the ideas resonated, ultimately vanquishing their predecessors. For the revolutionary opinions that support popular government were advanced under political-social circumstances that made them seem true, self-evident. According to Tocqueville, Enlightenment political ideals captured hearts and minds because

there was no taxpayer aggrieved by the injustices of the *taille* who did not welcome the idea that all men should be equal; no farmer whose land was devastated by a noble neighbor's rabbits who did not rejoice at hearing it declared that privilege of any kind whatever was condemned by the voice of reason. Thus, the philosopher's cloak provided safe cover for the passions of the day and the political ferment was canalized into literature, the result being that our writers now became the leaders of public opinion and played for the while the part which normally, in free countries, falls to the professional politician.⁵⁹⁶

This is why, as Tocqueville goes on to explain, ideas developed first in the minds of the era's intellectuals penetrated the psyche of the society at large, why,

instead of remaining as in the past the purely intellectual concept of a few advanced thinkers, [it found] welcome among the masses and acquire[d] the driving force of a political passion to such effect that the general and abstract theories of the nature of human society not only became daily topics of conversation among the leisure class but fired the imagination even of women and peasants.⁵⁹⁷

America was the place, as he had put it in his earlier work, that these "boldest theories of the human mind, which undoubtedly no statesman then had designed to be occupied,

⁵⁹⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime*, 142.

⁵⁹⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime*, 139.

were brought into practice.”⁵⁹⁸ Freedom and equality reigned in America from the beginning, not simply because they were legislated into existence, but because sacred opinions conducive to freedom permeated the social state. An unusually adamant Tocqueville insists “the reign of freedom cannot be established without mores, nor mores founded without beliefs.”⁵⁹⁹ Thus, to little avail, the inhabitants of Mexico “copied almost entirely” America’s Constitution. “But in transporting the letter of the law to themselves,” Tocqueville observes, “they could not at the same time transport the spirit that enlivened it.” The result: “Mexico is still no incessantly carried along from anarchy to military despotism, and from military despotism to anarchy.

Tocqueville on Islam and Liberal Democracy

In addition to Enlightenment ideas, it is well known that Tocqueville thought America’s depoliticized Christianity would prove a further invaluable support for liberal democracy insofar as the Gospels’ guiding tenets support liberal democracy’s founding principles. It is less well known that Tocqueville studied the Qur’an and Algeria as well.⁶⁰⁰ His most explicit discussion of Islam and Christianity with an eye toward their compatibility with democracy comes in Volume II of *Democracy in America*:

Mohammed had not only religious doctrines descend from Heaven and placed in the Qur’an, but political maxims, civil and criminal laws, and scientific theories. The Gospels, in contrast, speak only of the general

⁵⁹⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 42.

⁵⁹⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 11.

⁶⁰⁰ “J’ai beaucoup étudié le Coran à cause surtout de notre position vis-à-vis des populations musulmanes en Algérie et dans tout l’Orient” (22 October, 1843, *Notes sur le Coran*, 28).

relations of men to God and among themselves. Outside of that they teach nothing and oblige nothing to be believed. That alone, among a thousand other reasons, is enough to show that the first of these two religions cannot dominate for long in enlightened and democratic times, whereas the second is destined to reign in these centuries.⁶⁰¹

Islam is in theory totalitarian in scope, determining the structure of government, civil laws, the penal code, the economic system, even the proper manner of worship.⁶⁰² On Tocqueville's understanding, the comprehensive legal code prescribed by Mohammed is antithetical to the sacred laws that reign in democratic centuries. Tocqueville discusses this subject in greater detail in little-known notes he prepared in 1839 and 1840 upon a careful study of the Qur'an. France's interest in Algeria was a hot topic of debate in Paris and Tocqueville considered himself an expert on the subject, one of the only prominent Frenchman who understood Algeria's high importance to France. He even made two trips to North Africa at high risk to his personal health.⁶⁰³ Revealingly, Tocqueville's notes are contemporaneous with the publication of the second volume of *Democracy in America*, the part of that work focused most explicitly on the relationship between democratic ideas and democratic government. As Christopher Kelly has noted, Tocqueville's interest in Algeria's Muslim communities extended to, among other things, "their ability to accept the European democratic political principles and way of life."⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 420-421.

⁶⁰² By totalitarian, I mean here only that Islam provides a comprehensive system of laws and recommendations that constitute a thoroughgoing plan of living. The modern connotations of the term—that the state should employ coercive power liberally to enforce lives that reach deep into the lives of men and women—is a feature of modern Islamism (borrowed from 20th C. Western ideologies) but has not been an integral aspect of Islam as practiced for most of history.

⁶⁰³ Melvin Richter, "Tocqueville on Algeria," *The Review of Politics* Vol. 25, No. 3 (July 1963), 364.

⁶⁰⁴ Christopher Kelly, "Civil and Uncivil Religions: Tocqueville on Hinduism and Islam," *History of European Ideas* 20, no. 4-6 (1995), 846

Tocqueville's findings? For having put forth a legal code demanding political establishment of religious authority, Islam is less hospitable to democracy because the two powers—"les deux puissances": the prince and the high priest—are inextricably confounded and intermingled ("complètement confondu et entremêlé"). Religious diktat mandates the combination, which, when established, prevents separations of authority in the society, the very separations that limit government in the West in the service of individual freedom. The problem of political Islam is somewhat akin to the problem of Papists in Europe: where *people believe* religion conveys political authority and establishes the whole of the temporal law, limited government is impossible.

It is for this reason that Tocqueville makes so much of the fact Puritanism in America was "as much a political theory as a religious doctrine." He is particularly impressed that New England settlers believed it a religious duty to "combine [themselves] together into a civil body politick" for the sake of governing themselves under "just and equal laws" determined in common.⁶⁰⁵ In America, religious authority actually supported government of the people by the people by the people's lights. Even American Catholicism, he later notes (unlike Catholicism in eighteenth century Europe) had become uniquely supportive of the establishment of limited participatory government for having embraced the notion that "God had abandoned" temporal political concerns "to the free inquiries of men."⁶⁰⁶ Furthermore, vitally important democratic virtues,

⁶⁰⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 35.

⁶⁰⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 276-277.

independence and equality, were taught in great measure by American Protestantism and Catholicism respectively.

The Qur'an, in contrast, endows a representative of the Prophet, a Caliph, with temporal power to enforce His, and only His, laws. In addition to delegitimizing laws made by men by way of (say) democratic institutions, such laws stand in the way of independence of mind and action. The comprehensive character of the legal code, moreover, shrinks the sphere within which a private life is possible; as Tocqueville explains, "more or less every aspect of civil and political life is subject to the religious law."⁶⁰⁷ A comparable transformation of interpretation would have to occur in the Islamic world in order for its dominant opinions to be conducive to political liberalism.

A further problem for Tocqueville: all of the regime's prominent men—its priests, its rulers, its lawyers, its doctors, its philosophers—are steeped in, and loyal first and foremost, to the same religious beliefs. For they have all had an education based on the same religious principles: "le Coran est la source commune dont sont sorties la loi religieuse, la loi civile et meme en partie la science profane."⁶⁰⁸ Moreover, their vocations depend for their legitimacy on fidelity to holy writ, and so the entire professional class (which is to say society's elite) performs its social and political functions guided by the same prevailing loyalties. In other words, actors beholden to the same set of religious commandments perform virtually all of society's important temporal functions. All

⁶⁰⁷ My translation. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres Complètes*, III, 174-175.

⁶⁰⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Notes sur le Coran*, 40.

earthly authority is thereby concentrated in an elite that is invariably a religious elite.⁶⁰⁹

This tends ultimately toward despotism because the civil character thereby established does not conduce—does not permit!—divisions and separations durably sustained by conflicting opinions and loyalties.

The emphasis placed on submission—of mind and action—in Islam is problematic for the possibility of political liberalism. As Christopher Kelly explains, religion “dominates political life” on Tocqueville’s understanding, “and makes its adherents blind in their obedience to their rulers.”⁶¹⁰ The self-conscious abdication of reason and creative will annihilates personal initiative thereby ensuring economic weakness insofar as the people’s productive and creative capacities cannot be unleashed for lack of the freedom and incentive to create, accumulate and innovate. In Tocqueville’s words,

This concentration and confusion of the two powers established by Mohammed... is the primary cause of despotism and social immobility that has, almost always, characterized Muslim countries and accounts for the fact that these countries always finally succumb to those that have embraced the opposite arrangement.⁶¹¹

Even justice takes on a different meaning:

Religion and justice have always been intermixed in Muslim countries, just as ecclesiastical tribunals attempted to mix the two in Christian Europe during the Middle Ages. Determining what is just is not within a king’s rights, but left to God much more than to the prince. Rules of state are not the purview of civil law, but derived from the Qur’an and its commentaries.⁶¹²

That there is no distinction in Islam between what we might today call political (or procedural) justice, and morality or divine justice, may be the most important

⁶⁰⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres Complètes*, III, 174-175.

⁶¹⁰ Christopher Kelly, “Civil and Uncivil Religions: Tocqueville on Hinduism and Islam,” 848.

⁶¹¹ My translation. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres Complètes*, III, 174.

⁶¹² My translation. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres Complètes*, III, pp. 181.

impediment to liberal democracy in the Islamic world. Christian kings once claimed unlimited power to determine guilt and sentence prisoners according to authority claimed in God's name. Popes claimed unlimited political authority. It was the dethronement of politicized Christianity accomplished by the diffusion of Enlightenment opinions among a population tired of religious extremism that made possible tolerant participatory government devoted to freedom in the West. Tocqueville even ventures the suggestion that popular enlightenment might prepare Islamic lands for liberal democracy if modern opinions can take hold.⁶¹³ This revolution in psychic outlook has not, unfortunately, occurred in the Islamic world to date. In fact, in the Middle East, diametrically countervailing ideational trends are today discernable, the result of ominous winds that have been gathering for the better part of a century: Islam has, in fact, been further politicized over the last century by powerful thinkers who have exerted a tremendous impact. Before we turn to the origins, history, and dominant intellectual currents of contemporary Islamism, it is necessary to consider first in more careful detail the sacred opinions of a democratic citizenry and how they emerged.

⁶¹³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres Complètes*, III, pp. 325.

CHAPTER VI

THE SACRED OPINIONS OF A DEMOCRATIC CITIZENRY

Charles Kesler has noted that “it is difficult, though not impossible, to have an enduring liberal democracy unless it gets its first principles right, unless it cultivates them by means of a good constitution and civic character.” Those democracies that “just happened,” even in the absence of a deliberate founding and shared civic commitment, he continues, “could just as easily unhappen.”⁶¹⁴ What Kesler means is that liberal, limited, and stable government is not an inevitable outcome of free elections and participatory institutions. For government according to the will of the majority to be tolerant, just, and good, the people must first be tolerant, just, and good. Moreover, the foundational laws must be written in such a way as to animate the best in the people, and guard against the worst they are capable of. Absent this, free and fair elections can very easily lead to tyranny of the majority, dysfunctional government, and the brutal persecution of minorities, what Fareed Zakaria has famously termed “illiberal democracy.”

As Zakaria went on to explain in *The Future of Freedom*, a host of historical and economic factors help determine whether democratic government in a given time and place can be enduringly tolerant and liberal. While his analysis is no doubt correct so far as it goes, it does not go quite far enough. He focuses almost entirely on economic and historical factors—a large middle class, a favorable array of natural resources, a history of local autonomy—to the neglect of ideational factors. For example, Zakaria is surely right that

⁶¹⁴ Charles Kesler, “Iraq and the Neoconservatives,” *Claremont Review of Books*, Summer 2007. http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1383/article_detail.asp

a per capita GDP of \$3000 or better correlates with stable liberal democracy.⁶¹⁵ It is not particularly hard to understand why. Levels of wealth and material comfort associated with “middle class” existence—sufficient to give people stake in the regime and permit them some level of economic security—affect the character of that person’s political demands and political participation. So, too, those with an economic interest in a state’s continued existence are less likely to destabilize it for reasons of personal interest. What Zakaria does not emphasize is that the features he identifies as correlating with stable popular government that is also liberal are important because they instill a particular political character, one which induces the people to exercise the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship in a moderate and public-spirited way.

What, then, are the other, non-economic, sacred opinions, on which the possibilities of liberal democracy in the West rest? Many are so basic that citizens born and raised in functioning constitutional democracies fail even to appreciate they could be otherwise. They are more than just taken for granted: they are automatic and ubiquitous, internalized with the air, beliefs so self-evidently true (or at least true for us) that to reject them is to place oneself outside of polite and decent society. That all men (and women) are created equal and endowed with unalienable rights, that this equality means legitimate government is derived (and can only be derived) from the consent of the governed, that the authority of government is properly limited and individuals by right

⁶¹⁵ Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2003), 70. cf. Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 59 (February 1994), 1-22; and Seymour Martin Lipset, “Some Social Requisites of Democracy,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (March 1959), 69-105.

free to live and seek happiness as they please within very generous limitations protected by law, that matters of conscience are properly private affairs and deservedly insulated and protected from governmental intervention, that individuals should tolerate manners of pursuing happiness they emphatically believe to be immoral as a condition of citizenship—these commitments, though automatic for the citizens of Western democracies and vital to constitutional democracy—are not simply automatic and do not obtain everywhere. They had to take hold of minds, and for that, they had to seem—or be made to seem—“spiritually plausible.” Their prevalence in the West today is the product of a series of long and difficult revolutions in public consciousness that has not occurred in the Islamic world. The Enlightenment, the profound impact of European Romanticism, and the Reformation of European Christianity are responsible for a cluster of convictions and sacred opinions that give democratic government in the West its unique character. They are the ideas that account for the functioning of our laws and institutions; they are the spirit behind laws written on parchment.

The Natural Rights of Man

That “All men are created equal” and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights” are perhaps the most important phrases from America’s revolutionary era. Jefferson, by immortalizing these words in the Declaration of Independence, helped to ensure they would be celebrated by future generations of Americans, thereby to endure in hearts and minds. He, like many of the founders,

believed the principles underlying the American regime were indispensable to liberal democracy; and he believed the American experiment, by its success or failure, would help determine whether human beings are capable of establishing governments according to reflection and choice dedicated to preserving liberty on equal terms. He wrote of the Declaration, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of America's independence, these words in a letter to Roger Weightman:

May it be to the world, what I believe it will be, (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all,) the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings and security of self-government. That form which we have substituted, restores the free right to the unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion. All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man.⁶¹⁶

Political poetry of this sort, amplified by reverence for the founding generation and its heroic accomplishments, helps perpetuate the guiding ideals of the regime founded to protect and instantiate them. Before the American Revolution, the ideas had never before guided political life at the national level. They represent nothing short of a transformation in public consciousness, one that emphasizes the dignity of the individual and ultimately roots the legitimacy of government itself in its protection of individual rights. But how is it possible to transform individuals' self-conception of their own dignity?

The words of the Declaration expressed ideas that were in the air at the time, drawn largely from the political philosophy of John Locke, no doubt. They got some measure of traction because Locke argued that human beings have *natural rights*. That individuals

⁶¹⁶ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Roger C. Weightman, 24 June, 1826.

retain a right (a legitimate claim) to life, liberty, and estate (things held in common with which they've mixed what is undeniably theirs: their labor) is demanded, required, legitimate, and proper according to the new conception of justice he convincingly puts forth. To a population persuaded of this, a just regime is one that protects those rights. No other can be legitimate. Furthermore, everyone knows that Locke proves the *rightness*, the justice, of this arrangement by an appeal to nature. By positing a state of nature that looks nothing like the Garden of Eden—one prior to the establishment of human governments and the myriad unjust institutions and power relationships they erect—he offers a new North Star for the evaluation of government. Man's new natural state is one in which all men are free and equal. Liberty and equality, then—to which we are, by right, entitled—can only legitimately be given up where to do so is rational: necessary to secure, so far as possible, the rights and liberties men had before the establishment of government. Men enter into a society in order to protect their rights; what is given up is only justly given up because men consent to give it up; thus, a right of revolution is implied where the government, erected by the people's consent to pool their force and resources, exceeds the boundaries the population consents to allow it. This constitutes precisely the kind of public education that leads a people to demand a role in government; it is the kind of public education that produces prickly citizens, perpetually on guard against unjust accumulations of authority or encroachments upon their liberties. In a change, all of a sudden tyranny—which has always been bad but used to mean unjust government—means the unjust usurpation of rights and liberties property retained by individuals without their consent.

And yet, the difficulty is not entirely, nor even mostly, solved by proposing a conception of man's nature that man should find so appealing. For standing in the way of widespread acceptance of this new idea—that man has an unalienable right to life, liberty and his property—is man's concern for the only thing that should be, and in most times and places is regarded to be, more important: his soul. Insofar as eternal hellfire for the damned deprives of liberty and makes existence altogether unendurable, moreover, tales of *Hades* appeal most powerfully to those moved first and foremost by considerations of pleasure and pain, precisely the audience likely to be impressed by Locke's new teaching. Where the intermediation of a priestly class is believed (or widely *known*) to be required for Salvation, and where kings claim the authority to rule by Divine right, what pull over men's hearts and minds should doctrines such as Locke's, rooted in nothing better than a theoretical account of a primitive state of nature without religion or political authority, be able to muster? Should they not appear to be a road to hell paved by pride? Tyranny, after all, has an older counterpoise: just rule. Where kings can claim just rule requires Heaven's assent, a right to rule given to the descendents of Adam by God himself, and where a priestly class—guardians of personal Salvation—affirms the teaching, why should Locke have ever imagined, even for an instant, that his radical ideas might prove politically translatable?

This is the reason the *First Treatise* precedes the second. It also is the reason the *First Treatise* has been called the more radical book. Locke had first to refute the teaching that a king's claim to this-worldly sovereignty is justified by divine right—that is, given by God—not only on rational grounds that compel the intellect, but, more importantly, on

theological grounds that would persuade believers and the guardians of the faith. Thus, his tactic is to reduce to absurdity the argument in favor of the divine right of kings as put forth by the thinker who had “brought the argument to perfection.”⁶¹⁷ To this end, he shows that Filmer’s *Patriarcha* neither follows from its own premises, nor adheres to Biblical history. What is worse, it creates a political situation in which rival claims to temporal authority—impossible to finally adjudicate to the satisfaction of each—will continually convulse the Christian world, preventing both peace and honest forms of worship (an argument taken up in greater detail below with respect to Locke’s *Letter on Religious Toleration*).⁶¹⁸ Locke sees that wherever reigning opinions can move armies of men in the name of God, ambitious princes and churchmen will manipulate believers in service to their own personal advantage, amassing for themselves untold wealth and political power while corrupting the faith and destabilizing the regimes involved.

What is important for our immediate purposes is that Locke’s arguments—perhaps the best theoretical argument in favor of the natural rights of man—were also being espoused in Reformed tradition churches, both in Europe and (especially) in America. While scholars have long argued that Americans of the Revolutionary era “had absorbed Locke’s works as a kind of political gospel”⁶¹⁹—or as Michael Zuckert has it, that “Locke’s political doctrine... contains all the defining doctrines of the American

⁶¹⁷ John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, Cambridge ed. (Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press, 1960), paragraph 5.

⁶¹⁸ John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, paragraph 106.

⁶¹⁹ Carl L. Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (1922; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1942), 27.

Declaration of Independence”⁶²⁰ —Mark Hall has recently demonstrated that the churches of New England played at least as important a role in generating the new political consciousness that would support America’s constitutional regime, an influence that has been, for the most part, underappreciated.⁶²¹ To take two of the examples he cites, consider first one of the most famous works of resistance literature, *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos* (1579). As Hall explains, “the *Vindiciae* contends that men originally existed in a state of natural liberty, and that ‘the natural law [*ius Naturale*] teaches us to preserve and protect our life and liberty—without which life is scarcely life at all—against all force and injustice.”⁶²² It is not hard to see why Hall cheekily remarks that most commentators, in attributing responsibility for the ideas that made America to John Locke, “ignore the possibility that Locke’s political philosophy is best understood as a logical extension of Protestant resistance literature rather than as a radical departure from it.”⁶²³

In the American context, a most remarkable example comes from Henry Wolcott’s notes of an election Sermon attributed to Thomas Hooker, a member of Connecticut’s founding generation:

Doctrine. I. That the choice of public magistrates belongs unto the people by God’s own allowance.

II. The privilege of election, which belongs to the people, therefore must not be exercised according to their humors, but according to the blessed will and law of God.

⁶²⁰ Michael Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 16.

⁶²¹ Mark Hall, “Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos: The Influence of the Reformed Tradition on the American Founding,” Presented at the 2010 American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 24.

⁶²² Mark Hall, “Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos,” 9.

⁶²³ Mark Hall, “Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos,” 17.

III. They who have the power to appoint officers and magistrates, it is in their power also to set the bounds and limitations of power and place unto which they call them.

Reasons. 1. Because the foundation of authority is laid, firstly, in the free consent of the people.”⁶²⁴

Hall argues both that “Reformed thinkers had embraced these concepts long before Locke wrote his *Second Treatise*” and that it is likely they exerted a much more powerful popular influence than Locke did. In support of this contention, he shows, on the one hand, that by 1776, “84% of the region’s churches were in the Reformed tradition,” and on the other, that “with very few exceptions, Locke’s works were not even available in America until 1714,” at which point their availability and influence was more or less limited to society’s elites.⁶²⁵ In other words, John Calvin is at least as responsible as John Locke for the new political consciousness that constitutes this important aspect of the liberal democratic character. Thomas Jefferson may have had Locke’s *Second Treatise* in mind when he wrote the Declaration of Independence, but it resonated with Americans, particularly so with New Englanders, because the ideas were familiar to them from Sunday sermons and their own congregations.

None of this would come as a surprise to Tocqueville. Of the Puritan settlers in New England he says,

Proportionately, there was a greater mass of enlightenment spread among those men than within any European nation of our day. All, perhaps without a single exception, had received a quite advanced education... [W]hat distinguished them above all from all the others was the very goal

⁶²⁴ Perry Miller, ed., *The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 89.

⁶²⁵ Mark Hall, “Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos,” 19.

of their undertaking... in exposing themselves to the inevitable miseries of exile, they wanted to make *an idea* triumph.⁶²⁶

That idea: the political community should rule itself according to the principle of consent under just and equal laws. Now should it come as any surprise that this species of “mass enlightenment” is spread more easily among neighbors worshipping at such a church than through the wide dissemination of abstract philosophical treatises. Tocqueville goes on to assert that “Puritanism was not only a religious doctrine; it also blended at several points with the most absolute democratic and republican theories.”⁶²⁷ He gives an example from Nathaniel Morton’s history of New England according to which one of the first colonies to establish itself in northern Virginia did so with an act stating that reads as follows:

We whose names are under written... do by these presents solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politick, for our better ordering and preservation, and the furtherance of the ends aforesaid: And by virtue hereof, do enact, constitute and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and officers, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.⁶²⁸

It only remains to note that these ideas would only resonate the more furiously—and more widely—when the revolution broke out. Urgent situations increase the appeal of ideas that prove the righteousness of one’s cause (a fact we will return to in greater deal in the context of the Islamic Resurgence).

⁶²⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 32.

⁶²⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 32.

⁶²⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 35.

Independence of Mind and Will

If Reformed theology taught what Tocqueville calls the “dogma of the sovereignty of the people” particularly well, we should nonetheless begin with what it teaches in common with other strains of Protestantism. Among these, the most important must be the notion that every individual is entitled to his own unmitigated relationship with Christ and that, according to the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, the Bible—not a priest and certainly not the Church—is the final source of religious authority. To internalize the notion that one can read the Bible for oneself and be saved, or to seize upon the natural rights teaching of Locke, is simultaneously to transform one’s self-conception of the reach and authority of the human intellect. An individual’s confidence that he can, on the basis of his own lights determine for himself how best to conduct his life—even that he might only unlock nature’s mysteries and discover her laws by his own reason—was a powerful new idea. In the modern West, it was retrieved and asserted by the great minds of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, what amounted at the same time to an attack on entrenched religious authority in the name of the dignity of the individual.

The Enlightenment, of course, went further, much further. As one intellectual historian has noted,

What the entire Enlightenment has in common is denial of the central Christian doctrine of original sin, believing instead that man is born either innocent and good, or morally neutral and malleable by education or environment, or, at worst, deeply defective but capable of radical and

indefinite improvement by rational education in favorable circumstances...⁶²⁹

A further psychological blow for equality and independence is thus struck. The doctrine of original sin tied man to God and his community's traditions. For the requirements of Salvation demand to large extent, in practice at least, the subordination of the individual to his political community and the prevailing moral demands. Where original sin is taken for granted as a central fact of life, man does not belong to himself, as it were; his life is devoted to a great task *set for him* which he cannot—which it should not interest him to—escape. The alternative view—that every individual is uniquely competent to best arrange his private affairs to his own advantage, in fact, that no individual, neither priest nor magistrate, can be trusted to better arrange his private affairs for him—both implies an equivalence of human capacities and undermines the moral authority of established hierarchies. This species of confidence in the human intellect amounts to a presumption of moral and rational sufficiency; it presumes every man and every women is constituted well enough to choose for him or herself a meaningful and redeeming way of life. The view *could not* appeal absent the rejection of original sin. Its rejection paves the way for a kind of moral egalitarianism that lies at the root of contemporary liberal democracy. The generous individual freedoms, resolutely defended by political regimes in the Western world today depend, for their legitimacy, on this same sacred opinion: the notion that all men are women are equally capable (in principle at least) of putting their freedoms to good (or good enough) use. That the state itself should be dedicated to protecting

⁶²⁹ Isaiah Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2000), 264.

individual rights, including the right to each to pursue happiness however he or she defines it, is unthinkable absent this transformation in social consciousness.

The Dogma of the Sovereignty of the People

As important, the notion that just government can only be derived from the free consent of those subject to the laws is a proposition that is only intelligible if it is widely acknowledged that human beings are constituted in such a way that their private judgments on questions facing the community are all, in some sense, equally valuable. The notion that “all men are created equal” is, in the end, the theoretical basis for the legitimacy of government by consent (and therefore, the illegitimacy of all other forms of authority). Few societies have ever made the presumption of political equality the founding principle of government. The reason for this: the dogma is counter-intuitive in the extreme. Given the ineradicable differences among men—in terms of intellect, wealth, virtue, rearing, etc.—the justice or propriety of the one-person-one-vote principle is hardly obvious. And yet, that legitimate legislative authority resides with the people is one of the most basic tenets of democracy. Tocqueville asserts that the “dogma of the sovereignty of the people” is at the foundation of more or less every human political institution, although in most times, it “dwells... almost buried.”⁶³⁰

⁶³⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 53.

Its benefits are numerous. A deep commitment to this notion encourages citizens to demand a voice in government (in modern democracies, by way of representation, elections, and political participation). Citizens' belief that it is their right to impact policy—which is to say, the government's utilization of the power and resources citizens confer to it—exerts a limiting influence. Where the people believe it is their right, even their responsibility, to restrain government—and believe at the same time that they have a natural right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—they are much more likely actively to guard the liberties they believe government exists to protect.

The principle of consent cuts in another, equally important, direction. So long as the rules established to ensure citizens have had opportunity to exert fair and equal influence are respected, the vast majority are also prepared to recognize the legitimacy of, and to consent to uses of, the state's collected authority for purposes they do not always personally support (and in many cases vigorously oppose). That powerful minority factions, *and even in some cases majority factions*, willingly consent to constitutionally valid government initiatives prejudicial to their own interests is not automatic. But it is the prerequisite for a durable social contract among men whose interests rarely coincide perfectly, but who nonetheless share an abiding interest in stable government.

What lies at its root of this powerful idea? What persuades self-interested men, even majorities, not to revolt against measures they vehemently oppose, not to use (or seek to use) the authority of the government for personal or partisan gain at the expense of weaker minorities if a rule previously agreed upon prohibits it? Why should the stronger peacefully submit to a form of government that puts them on a level playing field with

those of inferior talent, intelligence, virtue, and closeness to God? That men (and women) who are manifestly unequal in virtually every respect of any significance for political life should participate politically on equal terms would seem, on the face of it, to be entirely unnatural.

Christianity as Original Source

Early democratic theorists, especially in the wake of the French Revolution, believed the species of depoliticized Christianity that had flourished in America was an indispensable support for liberal democracy. While Christianity had first to be reformed to free the individual and break the authority of religious hierarchies, many of the Gospels' guiding tenets were nonetheless important supports for liberal democracy's guiding principles. As Alexis de Tocqueville puts it in *Democracy in America*, "Despotism may govern without faith... but liberty cannot. Religion... is more needed in democratic republics than in any other."⁶³¹ Sanford Kessler argues that Tocqueville, in fact, "believed that the Christian faith was the source of the basic principles of liberal democracy and was the only religion suitable for maintaining liberty in democratic times."⁶³² This is certainly a plausible interpretation. Nothing conveys more powerful authority than religious conviction, as we have seen. And New Testament Christianity teaches fundamental democratic principles as simply true; thus, they gain widespread credibility absent rational

⁶³¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 521.

⁶³² Sanford Kessler, "Tocqueville on Civil Religion and Liberal Democracy," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (February 1977), 128.

proofs that compel the intellect. Most import among these principles, one finds the sacred commitments that form the indispensable keystone of modern liberalism: “all members of the human race are by nature equal and alike” and “all men have a common birthright to freedom.”⁶³³ Or as Tocqueville puts it, “Christianity, which has rendered all men equal before God, will not be loath to see all citizens equal before the law.”⁶³⁴

Perhaps no living political scientist has devoted more careful study to the character of liberal democracy, to its sustaining principles and the conditions under which those principles will endure, than Harry Jaffa. He goes so far as to attribute to the Gospels the popularization, if not the discovery, of the sacred opinion that all men are created equal. It is worth emphasizing again that the idea of human equality is not self-evidently true in the sense of its being automatically recognizable as such. The respects in which human beings are unequal—in size, strength, intelligence, virtue, creativity, inherited wealth, nobility of rearing, etc.—are surpassing evident. That these inequalities of character, ability, and resources should not be translated into political inequality does not automatically follow. And indeed, for most of the history of the West, those who thought themselves superior in some respect sought political power and utilized terrible means to achieve it—many Popes among them. Jaffa’s point is that the idea took hold of men’s minds throughout the West *thanks to Christianity*. Of course, Christianity had to be wrested from those who used its tremendous power for self-serving political ends, a point to be dwelled upon in some detail. For now, it is important to note that Rome’s imperial

⁶³³ Sanford Kessler, “Tocqueville on Civil Religion and Liberal Democracy,” 123.

⁶³⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 11.

conquest of the known world had as its consequence the dissemination of the Gospel throughout the known world. The result – though it took centuries – was that “the equality of human souls in the sight of God” was finally translated “into a political structure of equal political rights [that] has come to be regarded as the most authentic interpretation of the Gospel.”⁶³⁵

Jaffa invokes Bourke Cockrane, a spokesman for the Catholic Church in America at the turn of the twentieth century, to further elaborate this point. Cockrane explains with inimitable beauty:

The essential principles of democracy were not first formulated in our Constitution, nor in our Declaration of Independence, nor in the English Bill of Rights, nor in Magna Carta, nor in the institutes of King Alfred, nor in any monument of human wisdom, evolved from human experience. They were first revealed by the Divine Author of Christianity when he taught that all men are brothers, children of the same father, equal heirs to the same immortal heritage beyond the grave. As the political institutions under which men live always reflect the beliefs they cherish, a government built on the principle that all men are equal in the eye of the law resulted inevitably from the general acceptance of the religious doctrine that all men are equal in the sight of God.

While democracy was the inevitable, it was not the immediate fruit of Christianity. But this only shows that men find it easier to accept a truth than to regulate their lives by it. It took less than four centuries to convert pagan temples into Christian churches, but it took eighteen centuries for the religious beliefs of Christians to bear fruit in political institutions of freedom.⁶³⁶

It is not hard to appreciate the further respects in which New Testament Christianity (and the Christian ethic distilled from it and still politically important today) continues support tolerant liberal government: charity, forgiveness, and neighborliness are virtues of

⁶³⁵ Harry Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 151-152.

⁶³⁶ Bourke Cockrane, Address in New York City, 24 November, 1910. Quoted in Harry Jaffa, *New Birth of Freedom*, 152.

character; impartiality is a prerequisite of just judgment; a distinction between the obedience properly owed to Caesar and to God is explicitly sanctioned and so therefore, a separation between church and state; and both the Old and the New Testament place a high value of human freedom—in the Old Testament, the Israelites are liberated from Egypt (and directed thus: “thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt; Exodus 23:9), and in the New, God’s creatures are free to seek their own salvation (“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage”; Galatians 5:1). As Remi Brague has observed, “Outside the Judeo-Christian tradition, it has been rare for thinkers to suppose that God endowed us with a nature of our own, that freedom is part of that nature, and that it is through the exercise of freedom, and the errors that inevitably stem from it, that we fulfill God’s plan.”⁶³⁷

To dwell further on a political virtue supportive of liberalism, consider neighborliness. Consistent with the notion that all of God’s creatures are brothers is a willingness to treat strangers well, as we would prefer ourselves to be treated. This inclination—hardly automatic insofar as it resists the natural preference individuals have for their own—thereby cuts against the most pernicious political effects of tribalism. If a willingness to treat strangers as one would treat members of one’s own community—one’s neighbors—is not precisely a prerequisite of liberal democracy, it is certainly a support. Allow an anecdote to clarify the point and underline the unusualness of the disposition. John

⁶³⁷ Remi Brague, “Liberty and the Judaeo-Christian Inheritance,” in Roger Scruton, ed., *Liberty and Civilization*. (New York: Encounter Books, 2010), 62.

Agresto dedicates his book on Iraq to an Iraqi who worked for the Coalition and ultimately died for his country. Ali al-Hilfi, touched by a favor Agresto was able to bestow upon his sister, “decided to change his life... he would start becoming ‘an American.’” To become an American, Ali announced, “Everyday I will try to do something good for someone I don’t know, like you did for my sister. That’s all.”⁶³⁸ Not a few of Iraq’s political problems (detailed in Part I) are partly explained by this fact: doing good works for those who are not related by blood or by kin is unusual enough to stand out.

Separating Church and State

In spite of their near universal acceptance in the West today, these sacred views—that legitimate legislative authority is derived from consent, and that the majority’s authority over those who have consented to be governed is nonetheless limited—are relatively new. On the traditional understanding, legislative authority, the authority to give a people its laws, comes not from popular consent but directly from God, nor is there any predetermined limit to their reach into the lives of men. The reason for this: men are fallen, disappointingly constituted; the guidance of revelation is, thus, the essential component of a worthwhile life. Traditional moral codes often required the strict regulation of human behavior—for the sake of justice, righteousness, piety, and

⁶³⁸ John Agresto, *Mugged by Reality*, 3.

salvation—and for most of history, political authority has been utilized in support of that end.

Many of the modern opinions essential to limited government on the principle of consent are simply incompatible with this traditional understanding according to which the authority of God (and those who claim the right to rule on his behalf) extends deep into the temporal sphere. In the West, modern government first required a revolution in social consciousness generally referred to as the separation between church and state. This is a relatively new idea, no more than four hundred years old. For Jefferson, who coined the phrase, the notion that “religion is a matter which lies solely between man & his god” and that men’s consciences were rightly free of state interference, is nonetheless a central “maxim of civil government.” In matters of religion and state, he argued that “divided we stand, united, we fall.”⁶³⁹

What we, somewhat lazily, call the separation of Church and State in the West implies a great deal. It mandates nothing less than the establishment in legal code of a far-reaching species of moral indifference toward the beliefs and behavior of fellow citizens. It constitutes a minimum tolerance threshold established in law and maintained by the state’s determined refusal to allow the community’s collective authority and power to be utilized to instantiate a particular moral code. This unusual ethical disposition, a collective high-minded indifference to the moral choices of those we care about and live amongst, helps solidify other aspects of limited constitutional government including the

⁶³⁹ Thomas Jefferson, “Letter to Dr. Jacob De La Motta,” 1820; and “Letter to Danbury Baptist Association,” 1 January, 1802.

recognition of universal equality and so, equality before the law, as well as the containment of government to a very limited sphere beyond which individuals are free to pursue happiness however they personally define it.⁶⁴⁰ The separation is sustained by the emphatic collective denial that only the laws given by God are legitimate, and that they alone ought therefore to determine temporal laws. This belief is a reversal of the relationship between divine law and temporal legislation posited by Judaism and Islam.

Put another way, we believe that matters of conscience are, for the most part, properly private affairs. It would be rare to find someone who believes everything that is legal (just in one sense) is also right (just in another, arguably higher, sense). We believe it is *right*—*required* by the dictates of political justice—to tolerate a variety of moral outlooks, even those with which we do not entirely agree, and in many cases, even those with which we emphatically disagree. A person can believe that certain behaviors are simultaneously legal (and properly so), even if he is certain the behavior in question is repugnant, immoral, base, ugly, worthless, and wrong. To take a concrete example, a man of profound religious faith cannot be a judge in a liberal democracy if he is unwilling or unable to subordinate the moral demands of his faith to the laws of state it is his first duty to uphold. Laws with nothing behind them but the flimsy assent of the (oftentimes fickle,

⁶⁴⁰ Beyond this, the extension of legal indifference to all but the most basic questions of justice and morality (the punishment of murder, theft, rape, etc.) inevitably sets a powerful precedent for citizens' private dealings with one another. Limited government in the name of separating church and state—ostensibly equivalent to a political community's refusal to sanction the use of the state to enforce or condone a particular moral code—in fact provides a moral education by its very absence: the decision not to enforce a collective morality is in practice to indicate no moral code need be, no moral code is worth being promoted. When the public declines to enthusiastically endorse a moral code it (unintentionally) creates the impression no collective morality is required.

selfish, shortsighted, unenlightened) majority determine what is just from the perspective of the state even when that legislation comes into conflict with laws (an individual believes are) given by God. Minimizing our expectations of political justice—the standards of right enforced by the regime through its laws—to a set of rules and procedures applied equally to all, *and that allow a generous space for private action, belief, and worship*, is a perquisite of religious toleration.

As Mark Lilla has pointed out, this kind of legislated moral indifference is a truly remarkable, and historically unusual, achievement. For it requires a prior, and not easily accomplished (even unnatural) transformation of society's moral outlook. It requires that a political community deemphasize the concerns that have traditionally been most important to human beings: the soul, its immortality, and the requirements of salvation. Lilla calls *this* the “Great Separation” and explains that at the root of political liberalism is first and above all an “intellectual separation”:

We speak frequently of the separation of church and state as being fundamental to any modern democratic system of government. But for it to be successful, a prior, and much difficult, separation needs to be made in a society's habits of mind. Letting God be is not an easy thing to do, and cannot be induced simply by drawing a line between church and state institutions within a constitution, or dictating rules of toleration. For many believers in the biblical religions, today as in the seventeenth century, sundering the connection between political form and divine revelation seems a betrayal of God, whose commandments are comprehensive. Intellectual separation is difficult to accept and requires theological adaptation to be spiritually plausible; God must be conceived more abstractly, as having imposed upon himself a certain distance from the mechanics of political life. Such a theological transformation is unimaginable in many religious traditions, and difficult in all of them...

But it does seem to be a necessary condition of political liberalization and democratization as we understand [the terms].⁶⁴¹

In another work, Lilla goes so far as to note that Western civilization is the historical anomaly in this respect. The dis-integration of political theology and political theory—that is, the complete severance of careful thought about the demands of God revealed in holy books from man’s theorizing about the best political arrangement—is the hallmark intellectual achievement of the modern West. No other major civilization shares the assumptions underlying it. This singular achievement has made tolerant secular government possible in only a handful of Western democracies today.⁶⁴²

Liberalizing Christianity in a Spiritually Plausible Way

That aspects of Christianity are conducive of political liberalism does not mean the Christian world was always liberal. It is worth recalling that the flood of religious refugees moved from West to East during the wars of religion in Europe. Indeed, the crimes committed by Christians—Papists and Protestant alike—in the name of Christianity equal in ferocity, if they do not exceed, the crimes committed in the name of Islam today. Christianity has proven itself no less susceptible than Islam to being hijacked and utilized

⁶⁴¹ Mark Lilla, “Coping with Political Theology,” *Cato Unbound*. 8 October, 2007.

<http://www.cato-unbound.org/2007/10/08/mark-lilla/coping-with-political-theology/>

⁶⁴² Lilla goes so far as to suggest this audacious departure from the historical norm, at once the precondition of modern liberalism, has simultaneously imparted to Western civilization an intellectual and moral fragility only superficially concealed by its military might (Lilla, 2007). The public abandonment of the pursuit of moral certitude makes possible, on the one hand, a new level of tolerance for different moral outlooks and ways of living; on the other, however, it undermines the possibility of widespread confidence in the righteousness of a particular way of life, in this case even the one it makes possible: tolerant liberal democracy.

for illiberal political purposes by vain and enterprising men—be they princes or priests. Moderating Christianity’s theocratic, fanatical, and absolutist tendencies was a long and difficult process. The first act, the Reformation, in fact set off the very religious wars that convulsed the Christian world for more than a century. How, then, was this “Great Separation” brought about in the West? How we were able, how were we persuaded to, ‘let God be?’

The indispensable step was a reinterpretation of scripture that actually *authorized* or “made plausible” a separation between the affairs of God and the affairs of men. The Reformation struck the first blow. Luther’s radical insistence that salvation was attainable to individual Christians without the intermediation of the Catholic Church helped establish the dignity of the individual—his moral capacity to rule himself—in the Christian world. Erasmus’ high profile disagreement with Luther—on the question of free will—amplified the argument in favor of individualism, and demonstrated in fact the power and the propriety of the application of human reason to theological questions. Their ideas are remarkable in many respects, not least for their immediate political impact. Though he did not support it, Luther’s ideas inspired the Peasants Revolt in Germany, the largest popular uprising in history until the French Revolution; their *Ten Points*, a manifesto justifying political action, called for the establishment of democratic government on the basis that the teachings of the Gospels demanded it. Similarly, with memories of the Crusades, ostensibly undertaken in the name of Christianity scarcely faded, the Christian world’s theologians were expounding the virtues of tolerance; Luther, for instance, advised “tolerance toward Muslims and their rights” and “respect for their

commendable qualities and conduct.” In putting forth these views, however, Luther inadvertently helped to open a schism in the Christian world that would be used by power hungry priests and princes to set sect against sect for the sake of material and political gain.

By the time Benedict Spinoza made his contribution, religious wars among Christians had been raging for well over one hundred years. This is one of the main reasons why he, and later John Locke, advance more radical, expressly political, arguments about the propriety of freedom of conscience. On the professed authority of the Gospels, they also propose a new way of interpreting scripture that would emphasize tolerance and neighborliness as requirements of faith. Spinoza, in particular, insists that the New Testament properly understood *supports*, even *requires*, a tolerant and democratic regime devoted to securing the freedom of its inhabitants. For this reason, Martin Yaffe, among others, regards Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise* as “the philosophical founding-document of both modern biblical criticism and modern liberal democracy.”⁶⁴³ Steven Nadler goes as far in his analysis, but from a different (perhaps more fundamental) angle; with Spinoza’s *Ethics*, the *Theologico-Political Treatise* contains the “analyses” that would “contribute to undermining both the practical ability of religious authorities to control our emotional, intellectual, and physical lives and the theoretical justification they employ for doing so.”⁶⁴⁴ That Locke, too, professed to argue from religious principles, not against them, is similarly the reason his project to normalize the toleration of a diversity of

⁶⁴³ Martin Yaffe ed, “Translator’s Remarks” in *Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2004), vii.

⁶⁴⁴ Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, 32.

religious sects in a civil commonwealth succeeded.

It is worth dwelling on Spinoza's method insofar as he revolutionized political life—and man's conception of himself—in the West. Most important, Spinoza reads the Bible critically, taking liberties no pious commentator had ever dared. Theologians at the time condemned the work in the harshest possible terms: “a godless document”; one that “ought to be buried forever in an eternal oblivion”; an “atheistic book... full of abominations... which every reasonable person should find abhorrent.”⁶⁴⁵ And yet Spinoza's approach won the day, in large because he appeals to both man's reason and religiosity to advance an argument the reader should find attractive.

He begins by justifying his approach, that is, by denying that the divine law as revealed through the Prophets and the Apostles must be interpreted literally in all respects. With the exception of Moses and Christ, he musters scriptural evidence to support his claim that “no one received what was revealed of God except through the imagination”; that is to say, “God manifested himself to the Apostles through the mind of Christ.”⁶⁴⁶ He goes on to make the rather irreverent assertion that the Prophets were, on the whole, quite a disappointing group; God had to “accommodate[] revelations to the grasp and opinions of the Prophets.”⁶⁴⁷ In particular, Spinoza demonstrates that the Prophets were “ignorant of matters that have to do with theory alone and not with charity and the

⁶⁴⁵ Quoted in Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, xi.

⁶⁴⁶ Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise*, Martin Yaffe trans., (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2004), 6-7. (1.16.1, 1.14.3)

⁶⁴⁷ Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise*, 29, (2.10.1).

conduct of life.”⁶⁴⁸ As a result, what they reported was mainly a result of their own idiosyncrasies; much of the Bible, therefore, is but a product of their overactive imaginations. This is how Spinoza professes to show that their accounts cannot be taken as literally true. Since scripture is clear on a further point – that “*God poured his Spirit in human beings*” – even without clerical supervision, “we too might perceive the mind of God... since natural knowledge is common to all his beings.”⁶⁴⁹ By taking this last step—that is, by alleging that the word of God and the laws of nature are identical—Spinoza professes to show that according to God, we are all so constituted as to access knowledge of God and nature quite as well as the Prophets were.

Spinoza underlines this point in his radical refutation of miracles. Miracles, he tells us, are supposed to be important “signs” certifying the truth of particular revelations.⁶⁵⁰

Weakly citing *Exodus*, however, he equates “God’s direction” to a “fixed and unchangeable order of nature.” Thus, God’s decrees are nothing more than “the universal laws of nature, in accordance with which everything comes to be and is determined.”⁶⁵¹ What men call miracles are really aberrant accounts concocted by deficient minds to make sense of the things they cannot explain. The real proof of God is that nothing contrary to his decrees (nature’s fixed and eternal order) could ever occur. God’s will is thereby identified with his understanding. A perfect understanding never changes. If such an eternal order can be known by the human intellect—and Spinoza

⁶⁴⁸ Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise*, 29, (2.10.1).

⁶⁴⁹ Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise*, 13 (1.21.1-1.21.4).

⁶⁵⁰ Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise*, 18 (2.3.1).

⁶⁵¹ Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise*, 32 (3.3.2).

has already asserted that it can be—then human beings are capable of knowing the truth by their own lights. What follows from this is important from the perspective of liberal democracy: the authority of divine law is seriously undermined if the accounts in the Bible cannot be trusted; but since human beings are capable of apprehending the world for themselves by their natural lights, they constituted in a way to give themselves reasonably good laws, even on the principle of consent.

With this, the “goal I am aiming at,” as Spinoza puts it, “namely separating Philosophy from Theology,” would seem to be all but complete.⁶⁵² Indeed, there is evidence to suggest the primary purpose of the *Treatise* is to free philosophy from the domineering master that was Medieval Scholasticism; he insists reason should no longer “serve as handmaid to theology.”⁶⁵³ His project is achieved by doing three things simultaneously: he casts doubt on the substance of the better part of scripture as it had been interpreted by religious authorities (by, in particular, denying the infallibility of revelation and rejecting miracles outright); he asserted the identity of God and nature; and he presumed its knowability by the human intellect which has infinite reach. If he did not quite prove each proposition, he did offer novel scriptural justifications at key junctures. But keeping in mind his goal is not a pious one, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that what Spinoza has shown is not, on an honest interpretation, actually mandated by the scripture; at best, it is tolerated by scripture. In other words, he has claimed the alternating authority of

⁶⁵² Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise*, 30 (2.5.10).

⁶⁵³ Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise*, xxiii (P.6.2).

both reason and revelation for his assertions, but neither reason nor revelation mandates the entire result.

In this connection, it is important to note two further things. First, by his selection of a verse from the Book of John to adorn the title page, he may well mean to communicate his belief that Christianity is well suited, perhaps uniquely so among the monotheistic religions, to permit the coexistence of rational and religious faith in the same political community. *John* begins “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Greek word for “word” is λογος (*logos*), which means something closer to “rational speech.” The specific verse Spinoza chooses (*I John* 4:13) invokes again God’s special gift to man (“He has given us of his Spirit”) in order to emphasize man’s affinity to God, and therefore man’s ability to know God (“we know that we remain in God and God remains in us”). In the face of this implied identity—of God and reason—it is possible to dispute suggestions that there is a diametric opposition between reason and revelation on the grounds of the New Testament. While early Islamic theology made a deliberate place for reason following Islam’s encounter with Greek philosophy, later theologians and jurists forbade the application of reason to human questions, a development with no shortage of pernicious repercussions, not a few of which are discussed in the next chapters. Second, Spinoza was aware that most men are not, and will never be, philosophers; those who live according to opinion and superstition (those he calls the vulgar), moreover, are susceptible to the inflaming arts of clever demagogues. It follows that the character of the political community’s sacred opinions matters a great deal, especially if one is particularly concerned about the

regime's stability. Thus, Spinoza's work is far from finished. Persuading the masses—whose gullibility is, on Spinoza's account, the reason religion is so powerful in the world—is not, in the end, as easy as presenting a philosophically-sophisticated new way to read the Bible.

For this reason, Spinoza does not appear to be an arch rationalist on the model of a Voltaire. For he wants to emphasize, even to champion, those aspects of the Christian faith that are conducive to stable, gentle, well-ordered politics. Thus, in authorizing man's application of reason to the natural order and the word of God, he appears to hold something back: "We accordingly conclude that we are not bound to believe the Prophets in anything else besides what is the aim and substance of the revelation. In the rest, each is free to believe as he wants."⁶⁵⁴ What is the overall "aim and substance" of the New Testament, an area in which he seems to reserve at least the trappings of divine authority? Spinoza had earlier said that while Prophets were "ignorant" of theoretical matters, they were sufficiently well equipped to communicate the revelations they received from Christ concerning "charity and the conduct of life" without distorting them. For the "vulgar," then, Spinoza labors to show with copious references to Biblical verse that what can be known with certitude from sacred scripture essentially amounts to this: "there exists a highest being who loves Justice and Charity and whom all, so that they may be saved, are bound to obey and adore by the cultivation of Justice and Charity toward their neighbor."⁶⁵⁵ Thus, he distills a very gentle "catholic faith" from scripture,

⁶⁵⁴ Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise*, 29 (2.10.3).

⁶⁵⁵ Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise*, 165 (14.1.38).

one that is perfectly suited to supporting tolerant liberal democracy.

And this, Spinoza explains at the end of his book, was his intention all along. Reason must be liberated as we have seen. But for that, the hatreds and anger that can be turned against philosophers, especially well by those claiming philosophy undermines the community's religion, must be quelled. Freedom—of thought and action—is both the end and the way.

The aim of the Republic is not, I say, to make human beings from rational beings into beasts or puppets, but, on the contrary, it is for their mind and body to function safely in their functions and for them to use free reason and not struggle in hatred, in anger, or with a ruse, and not bear an inequitable spirit toward one another. The aim of a Republic, therefore, is really freedom.⁶⁵⁶

Freedom of conscience is thus more than simply a good to be desired. It is, in fact, the precondition of stable and gentle politics—the condition of securing all manner of freedoms—because freedom of conscious and religious pluralism effectively tame religious belief, and thereby, the violence it can inspire. Spinoza's key insight in this respect: people do not become fanatical about beliefs they themselves are free to choose or not to choose. People become attached to beliefs all the more fervently in proportionate to their fear someone might attempt to take them away, or to punish them violently for believing the impermissible. As Spinoza puts it at the outset of his book (in reference to the wars of religion, the atrocities committed by Christians of one sect against those of another), "As for the seditions that are aroused by a show of religion, they in fact arise in that laws are set down concerning theoretical matters, and opinions are considered a crime and

⁶⁵⁶ Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise*, 231 (20.4.12-13).

condemned as though they were wicked deeds.”⁶⁵⁷

Spinoza’s point: religion welded to coercive authority leads to fanatical belief; private, un-coerced, religious belief does not. Moreover, violence committed in the name of fanatical belief proceeds to further amplify fanatical belief among other believers. By asserting the intellect’s authority and its capacity to discern “theoretical matters” for itself—that is, by marshaling divine authority in the service of freedom of conscience—and by simultaneously emphasizing charity and gentleness as cardinal virtues, he has offered an interpretation of the Bible, new sacred opinions, that cannot become a weapon of the vain churchmen and ambitious princes who would abuse scripture’s tremendous authority to amass political power and wealth for themselves (corrupting both politics and religion in the process). Put another way, an interpretation of Christianity that denies the legitimacy of compelling obedience—one that recommends neighborliness above all—can never become a tool of terror and oppression. To sunder the link between politics and religion, it suffices to persuade Christians that the overlap is unchristian, a corruption of the true teaching. As a corollary, a political regime in which “only *what is done were reproved and what is said were said with impunity*” will rarely see controversies rooted in opinion turn violent.⁶⁵⁸ Again, very few become so fanatically attached to opinions they are free to hold or not hold with impunity as to be willing to fight and die for them.

John Locke’s *Letter Concerning Religious Toleration* follows the same logic. For present purposes, it suffices to note that Locke, too, cites scripture (with which he takes liberties)

⁶⁵⁷ Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise*, xviii (3.3.1).

⁶⁵⁸ Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise*, xviii. (3.3.20).

to persuade his audience that True religion “is not instituted in order to the erecting of an external pomp, nor to the obtaining of ecclesiastical dominion,” but for personal spiritual reasons: “to the regulating of men’s lives, according to the rules of virtue and piety.” Since the Gospels authorize little overlap between earthly and ecclesial authority, he posits two separate spheres: one devoted to the civil interests of men (“life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things”)⁶⁵⁹ which is therefore properly “confined to the care of the things of this world”,⁶⁶⁰ and a second devoted to the things of “the world to come.” The latter is the sphere of the church, which, Locke emphasizes, is “a voluntary society” one that joins men together for purposes of worship and “the salvation of their souls.” After all, “penalties are no way capable to produce [genuine] belief” (force and fear cannot “convince the mind”),⁶⁶¹ and since only minds freely convinced of the God’s truth will achieve salvation, there is no conceivable scriptural justification for the compulsion of outward religious observance. Princes, furthermore, who are “certainly less concerned for my salvation than I myself am,” can make no special claim to knowledge of “the one only way which leads to heaven.”⁶⁶² The conclusion Locke underlines: “In vain, therefore, do princes compel their subjects to come into their Church communion, under pretence of saving their souls. If they believe, they will come of their own accord, if they believe not, their coming will nothing avail

⁶⁵⁹ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 3.

⁶⁶⁰ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 5.

⁶⁶¹ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 5.

⁶⁶² John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 13. Of course, princes did claim Divine authority by professing descent from Adam. Locke refutes this claim in the *First Treatise*.

them.”⁶⁶³

The same argument annihilates any clerical claim to temporal authority. For there is no legitimate ecclesiastical use for coercive power: first, it has been established that obedience of conscience cannot be compelled; and second, Locke explains that New Testament Christianity is properly a personal faith; “[Christ], indeed, hath taught men how, by faith and good works, they may obtain eternal life; but He instituted no commonwealth. He prescribed unto His Followers no new and peculiar form of government.”⁶⁶⁴ Thus, just as magistrates are confined to the civil sphere, so priests “ought to be confined within the bounds of the Church,” that voluntary organization; from this it follows—again, on the authority of Biblical teachings—that “the boundaries on both sides are fixed and immovable.”⁶⁶⁵ Force rightfully “belongs wholly to the civil magistrate”⁶⁶⁶ to be used exclusively for the limited purposes it is good for: for civil purposes. The civil purposes which in the first place oblige “men to enter into society with one another, that by mutual assistance and joint force they may secure unto each” their lives, their liberty and their property, has the further effect of establishing a limit beyond which the deployment of force drawn from the collective is not legitimate. The limit, of course, is established by the judgment of the consenting parties; only the incursions they judge necessary to securing life, liberty, and property are permissible.

One further consequence of Locke’s line of argument deserves emphasis: if no human

⁶⁶³ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 14.

⁶⁶⁴ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 20.

⁶⁶⁵ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 10.

⁶⁶⁶ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 7.

authority can verifiably claim Divine knowledge, “a controversy between [two] churches about the truth of their doctrines and the purity of their worship is on both sides equal.” Furthermore, since nothing is more important than salvation, and since no one cares about a particular individual’s salvation more than he himself, religious toleration is “agreeable... to the genuine reason of mankind”⁶⁶⁷; that is, a rational actor will insist on “ecclesiastical liberty” because it is “necessary to the salvation of [his] soul.”⁶⁶⁸ On this question, scripture agrees with reason, or so Locke would have us believe; for he proceeds, now, to insist religious toleration is “agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ” and even “the chief characteristic mark of the true Church.”⁶⁶⁹ Sundering the link between high priest and prince means no priest, no prince, can claim the authority to arbitrate religious disputes with any claim to confidence.

From all of this it follows that there are only two species of opinion, expressions of which are not to be tolerated according to God and reason: atheistic, and those which are “contrary... to the preservation of civil society.”⁶⁷⁰ Atheists are noxious because “the bonds of human society”—promises, covenants, and oaths—“can have no hold upon” them. An opinion impermissible for being poisonous to the legitimate purposes of civil society is any that might “tend to establish dominion over others.”⁶⁷¹ Locke is crystal clear on this point: no religion that requires specific “ecclesiastical laws do there unavoidably become part of the civil,” or that reserves this-worldly obedience to an

⁶⁶⁷ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 3.

⁶⁶⁸ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 6.

⁶⁶⁹ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 1,3.

⁶⁷⁰ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 24.

⁶⁷¹ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 25.

authority other than the civil magistrate, can claim the privilege of being tolerated.⁶⁷²

Religions that deny the legitimacy of the separation of church and state cannot demand a place in the commonwealth on the basis of its having separated church and state.

It remains, at this point, only to consider how Locke has resolved the problem of religious fanaticism. He takes up the objection to his entire schema that would have been obvious to all the time he wrote it: religious toleration should seem a recipe for disaster; it is to advocate the intermixture of the very sects that have demonstrated themselves most “inclined to factions, tumults, and civil wars.” Locke’s reply: “Is that the fault of the Christian religion?”⁶⁷³ If it is, no commonwealth should tolerate Christianity! For on the argument Locke has advanced, a religion “turbulent and destructive to the civil peace” is both impermissible and unchristian. Since Christianity, his readers would no doubt agree, “is the most modest and peaceable religion there ever was,” the cause of the wars of religion in Christian Europe must lie outside religion itself.

And it does. It lies, for Locke, in “the refusal of toleration to those that are of different opinions.”⁶⁷⁴ Not Christianity, but the leaders of the Church are to blame. For “moved by avarice and insatiable desire of dominion,” they manipulated princes by appealing to their ambition for worldly conquest and dominion; together, prince and high priest preyed on “the credulous superstition of the giddy multitude,” for the sake of amassing power and wealth. They used believers’ faith in another world to achieve their own worldly ambitions. They did so, moreover, by corrupting Christianity. Only by ignoring

⁶⁷² John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 20, 25.

⁶⁷³ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 28.

⁶⁷⁴ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 28.

“the laws of the Gospel” and its “precepts of charity,” and preaching lies (while claiming divine authority) were they able to so inflame Christians that Protestants came to view Catholics as “schismatics and heretics... to be outed of their possessions and destroyed” (and vice versa). Those suffering such evils naturally thought it “lawful for them to resist force with force.” Locke now underlines what Spinoza noticed earlier: crimes committed in the name of fanatical belief tend to amplify fanatical belief. There is but one solution: render Christianity itself insusceptible to such manner of abuse by vain and fallen men by reinterpreting scripture in such a way as to make fanaticism itself the greatest evil. This is what Lock’s *Letter* professes to do. It establishes on the basis of reason and the Gospels that the most intolerable belief is that Christianity legitimates violence in the name coercing belief.

The novel rereadings of the Bible proposed by Spinoza and Locke exerted a profound influence, both in Europe and America. In his monumental history of Christianity, Diarmaid MacCulloch credits Spinoza with being the first to demand “the Bible be treated as critically as any other text.”⁶⁷⁵ By addressing theologians and preachers in addition to philosophic readers, moreover, he hoped his ideas would trickle down.⁶⁷⁶ They did. Within a few decades, ordinary believers in the West felt free to mock Jesus—a startling new development for the time.⁶⁷⁷ What is more, a revolution in criticism, one that built upon the efforts of Luther and Erasmus, was the beginning of a new spirit of toleration in Europe. MacCulloch observes that

⁶⁷⁵ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 780.

⁶⁷⁶ Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, 22.

⁶⁷⁷ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation*.

[a]s a result of this new scrutiny of the Bible, there was a growing feeling among some Western Christians that not merely other Christianities or even Judaism, but other world religions, might provide insight into truth... This new spirit of reverent openness directly related to the worldwide reach of Western power and trade by 1700. Islam seemed much less threatening politically as the Ottoman, Iranian and Moghul empires fell into decay. Now educated Europeans had a much better chance of understanding this other monotheism.⁶⁷⁸

Brad Gregory has gone even further. In the context of Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*, he observes that even the Church embraced the Enlightenment's metaphysical and epistemological assumptions without realizing their magnitude or consequence for religious authority:

[M]ost theologians could not see how the construction of the 'academic Bible' and the 'Enlightenment Bible' was displacing scripture in the service of novel ideologies of self, society, and the state because nearly all of them unself-consciously held univocal metaphysical beliefs in common with the rationalizing biblical scholars...

The vast majority of theologians seem simply to have been unaware of the implications of their own metaphysical assumptions for the ways in which the relationship between the natural and the supernatural was being construed. Even Catholic theologians were unlikely to see how deeply the Enlightened rejection of the biblical God, whether in aggressive or subtle forms, impinged on their sacramental worldview.⁶⁷⁹

In its denial that theology monopolized the entire intellectual sphere (and therewith, by denying that revelation was the only source of just law), this new manner of interpreting the Bible—proposed by Spinoza among others—made a place for the new political teachings of the Enlightenment and later, the more radical contributions of the Romantic Movement. Liberal government, as we know it today, would be impossible absent this transformation of mind.

⁶⁷⁸ MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, 785.

⁶⁷⁹ Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 345-346.

Locke's contribution was equally important. It is impossible to read James Madison on religious freedom and not think of the *Letter*. As Mark Hall has shown, Lockean ideas were ubiquitous in America in the decades leading up to the Constitutional Convention; more often than not, they were united to the Gospels and expressed from the pulpit itself. Such profound influence can be attributed to mere words only because the arguments could credibly marshal the authority of Christianity. They did not simply condemn princes who sought to inflame religious passion for political gain, nor did they blame religion itself for the crimes committed in its name; they were successful because they cited the Gospels to support their proposition that princes cannot legitimately claim religious authority, nor churchmen, secular authority. They were successful because they demonstrated that the Bible mandates freedom of conscience and there too, the toleration of a plurality of religious sects. Thus, the diffusion of new sacred opinions legitimized the proposition that church and state are properly confined to separate spheres.

Locke only hints that of the monotheistic religions, New Testament Christianity may be particularly well suited to this separation. His examples of religions pernicious to a civil state based on consent were Islam (likely also a stand-in for the Papists) and “the commonwealth of the Jews” which was once an “absolute theocracy.”⁶⁸⁰ Christianity, in contrast, emerged while Rome was, politically and militarily, at its zenith. The Empire was powerful, but decadent and debauched; it needed moral reform, not political reform. Thus, Christianity emerged as a system of morality in a world dominated by a single

⁶⁸⁰ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple Trans., paragraph 20.

powerful state. A historian might put it this way: New Testament Christianity made no claims to comprehensive political authority because it could not credibly have done so. Worship and adherence was, in the beginning, a private and voluntary affair because it had to be. Christians, far from receiving state support, were persecuted for their beliefs, a dynamic that would have immense political consequences. Moreover, as Bernard Weiss explains, Christendom was not built on anything that can be termed “Christian law”; rather, the Christian world absorbed, if it did not grow out of, Rome’s legal strictures (which were, themselves, republican in origin). As Weiss puts it,

When during the fourth century Christianity finally prevailed politically, it took over the empire within which it had spread, including its law. Thus Roman law would become the foundational law of the Christian world.⁶⁸¹

That Christianity was, at its beginning, a system of morality that made no claims to total political authority may be one important reason the reinterpretations put forth during the Reformation (as well as by Spinoza and Locke) proved to be spiritually plausible.⁶⁸² Islam, in contrast, emerged in a barbaric time—as a complete moral, political, and economic order—and was spread from the beginning at the sword of a great conqueror. With the religious commandments He revealed, Mohammed brought order and justice to an expansive territory, what required the enforcement of a comprehensive legal code. Where Jesus denied the appropriateness of wielding total temporal authority in God’s name, Mohammed demanded nothing less. The Biblical injunction “Render Unto Caesar What is Caesar’s” has no operative equivalent in the Qur’an. In fact, Weiss explains that Islam’s self-understanding is almost precisely the opposite:

⁶⁸¹ Bernard Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law* (University of Georgia Press, 2006), 4.

⁶⁸² Roger Scruton, “Islam and the West: Lines of Demarcation,” *Azure* (Winter 2009, 35), 10.

In the world of Islam, all such consciousness was resisted. Islam spread throughout the world with a very different kind of consciousness, a consciousness of bringing a new law and polity to areas it overran, of inaugurating a new religiopolitical era. The Muslims did not appropriate an empire but rather created one. For Christians, the Roman empire remained Roman. The caliphal empire was decidedly not Roman (nor, for that matter, Sassanian); it was Arab and Islamic. Islam's mission was precisely to bring to the world a new polity and law, replacing all outmoded politics and laws.⁶⁸³

The Dependence of American Republicanism on Christianity

The American Founders agreed with the understated aspects of Locke and Spinoza's assessment of Christianity, admittedly somewhat obscured by their manner of criticism: free government depends on specific virtues of character best cultivated by a depoliticized Christianity. Just as Locke and Spinoza intimated Christianity's importance to the continued cultivation of honesty and neighborliness, so American statesmen have long believed public religiosity to be an important support for republican citizenship.

The maintenance of morals was so important to the Anti-federalists, in particular, that one of their most urgent arguments against the establishment of a large commercial republic with a powerful central government was that it might reduce the political importance of Christianity by locating national politicians too often too far from the watchful eyes of their congregations. Less well known is the fact that even the most prominent Federalists identified Christianity as an important support for the Constitutional arrangement that made America. George Washington, for instance, urged

⁶⁸³ Bernard Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law*, 5.

Americans in his first message to Congress “to discriminate the spirit of liberty from that of licentiousness—cherishing the first, avoiding the last.” In his Farewell address, America’s foremost model of a man of first character exhorted his fellow citizens to practice their faith for the sake of the country.

...Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with the private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation *desert* the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle...⁶⁸⁴

John Adams agreed. As he famously put it, “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” Even Alexander Hamilton, upon leaving government some eight years after the Constitution was ratified, made this ominous declaration: “Ah, this is the constitution... Now mark my words! So long as we are a young and virtuous people, this instrument will bind us together in mutual interests, mutual welfare, and mutual happiness. But when we become old and

⁶⁸⁴ George Washington, “Farewell Address.”

corrupt, it will bind us no longer.”⁶⁸⁵ Upon reading of the horrible excesses of the French Revolution, he is said to have gone even further, remarking in George Washington’s home that “Religion and morality are essential props” for the arrangement established by the American Constitution.^{686 687}

The Tocquevillean articulation never fails to leap to mind on occasions such as these. Christianity not only helped make essential principles of political liberalism “spiritually plausible” in the first place; American Christianity also supported *mores* and opinions conducive to the maintenance of freedom. Tocqueville perceived that as political freedom increases, moral bonds must be tightened.⁶⁸⁸ In America, the dangers that spring from individualism—tyranny of the majority and mild despotism, especially—are

⁶⁸⁵ Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, (New York: Penguin, 2004), 484.

⁶⁸⁶ James Madison would never go quite so far. Harriet Martineau, an English visitor, recorded a conversation she had with Madison in 1834 or 1835 in which he expressed an “enthusiastic faith in the possibility of an immortal republic” (Burke, 1999, 276) citing Americans’ republican vigilance, an aspect of the American character he believed would endure absent any religious support. He explained to her that the republic would persist indefinitely “not only because the people, its constituency, never dies, but because the principles of justice in which such a commonwealth originates never die out of the people’s heart or mind” (Martineau, 75). This is consistent with Madison’s earlier insistence that religiosity is more often a threat to republican government than a bulwark against decline. It is also consistent with Madison’s contributions as Publius on the subject of the people’s character. The closest he comes in the *Federalist Papers* to an acknowledgment that public virtue might be counted on to help maintain the republic’s health is his observation in #57 that “above all, the vigilant and manly spirit which actuates the people of America” is the final guard of liberty in America (cf. Zuckert, 1999, 136). Thomas Jefferson, similarly, opposed “putting the Bible and Testament into the hands of the children” and seemed to believe a civic-humanist-technical education directed to “geniuses” annually “raked from the rubbish” at a young age would be sufficient to elevate a “natural aristocracy” to political office year after year (Jefferson, 1984, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 271-273; cf. *Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia*, and *Letter to John Adams*, Oct. 28, 1813). Madison and Jefferson agree that the virtues of citizenship must be transmitted to future generations for upright constitutional government to endure. But they placed their hopes not in religion, but in popular enlightenment, whether of the population as a whole or the governing elite.

⁶⁸⁷ Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 507.

⁶⁸⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 282.

mitigated where the citizens remained bound to one another, and to higher ideals, thanks to shared religious convictions. Rampant materialism was one of Tocqueville's fears. By equalizing all citizens in political impotence, while simultaneously protecting property and contracts, "democracy favors the taste for material enjoyments." For Tocqueville, religiosity combats this insofar as it is *the* "general, simple, practical means of teaching men the immortality of the soul."⁶⁸⁹ That men and women continue to believe they have a soul is important because once they come to believe "that all is nothing but matter," theoretical materialism transforms individualism—what draws people to put their own concerns ahead of their community's—into a selfish and narrow materialism. It is a short step from theoretical nihilism to practical hedonists and for a hedonist, there is no reason to pursue or refrain from anything unless the result will be increased pleasure. That is not a good citizen. Tocqueville thereby echoes the concern expressed by Washington and Locke: without a powerful support for honesty and neighborliness—opinions that tie people to their communities and keep them good—democracy very quickly degenerates into an ugly brand of tyranny of the majority, citizens using the rights and privileges of citizenship to advance the interest of their narrow coteries. Upright democratic government requires that the citizens love their commonwealth and exhibit an impressive degree to self-control. Christianity teaches self-restraint while simultaneously teaching men to love their fellows, even those they do not know personally.⁶⁹⁰

Edmund Burke conveys Tocqueville's essential point with art and concision:

⁶⁸⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 419, 519.

⁶⁹⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 504-505.

Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites,—in proportion as their love to justice is above their rapacity,—in proportion as their soundness and sobriety of understanding is above their vanity and presumption,—in proportion as they are more disposed to listen to the counsels of the wise and good, in preference to the flattery of knaves. Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.⁶⁹¹

How European Romanticism Gave Birth to Tolerance and Hyper-tolerance

And yet, the opinions put forth by Enlightenment and Reformation thinkers—though sufficient to depoliticize Christianity—did not alone suffice to build the social consciousness of the contemporary West. For the presumption that certainty on the most difficult questions is possible—whether it is achieved by reason or revelation—leads inexorably to attempts to instantiate those truths by force, to use the public appeal of professed truths to accumulate and deploy political authority. Enlightenment thinkers, none more than Spinoza, tended to believe all of nature—its natural laws and its moral laws—could be discovered by rational investigation, that human beings were sufficiently endowed to discover those laws without divine help, and that all of nature’s truths were consistent. What they did not sufficiently appreciate is how little room they had left for disagreement among those who were absolutely certain their opinions were the right ones. Or put another way, the assumption that an ordered nature can be known entirely by unaided human reason opens the way to fanatical attachments to rational accounts of what is best for mankind, while at an instant undermining centuries of tradition—the

⁶⁹¹ Edmund Burke, *Complete Works*, Volume IV, 51.

moral convictions built over time on the authority of revealed teachings—that might otherwise have stood in the way of this new species of certitude.

Certain answers to the most important moral and political questions, professedly achieved by reason, can inspire both utopian political treatises and dangerous political ambition—quite as well, in fact, as religious certainty can lead to fanaticism when political authority is intermingled with it. Thus, Enlightenment ideas helped to fuel the French Revolution and its terrors. The terrible totalitarian movements of the twentieth century in the West—National Socialism and Soviet Communism—were, likewise, inspired by atheistic ideologies that sought to engineer totally new societies on the basis of theories and the theorists who believed they had discovered truths worth instantiating.

To move from certitude that there is single unalterable truth according to which all of society should be organized, whether derived from revelation or discovered by human reason, to the acceptance of the possibility that a variety of ways of living may be worthwhile, and that the political arrangement should protect individuals' freedom to pursue happiness as they themselves conceive of it within very generous boundaries protected by law, a further revolution in social consciousness was necessary. Isaiah Berlin calls European Romanticism “the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred.”⁶⁹² Its new emphasis on sentimentality and emotion, the charms of aesthetic life, love, all the things men and women feel—in a word, the inner (and not always fully rational) life of the individual—represents a dramatic step away from the thitherto accepted assumption that public life should, so far as possible, be organized

⁶⁹² Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 1.

according to a single coherent system of morality. This privileging of the sentimental side of man, so long suppressed by authoritative conceptions of good and evil, noble and base, decent and obscene, would progressively replace what had for a long time been the North Star of European civilization: the search for truth, rational or religious, and the belief that the community should be organized according to it.

European Romanticism—ironically made possible by the Enlightenment’s assault on authority—amplified it from a new, and arguably more powerful, direction. If truth cannot be known, other excellences are elevated: creativity, genius, beauty, passion, the sublime, depth of feeling, etc. Thus, from the middle of the Eighteenth Century, worthy action—the meaning of “noble”—comes increasingly to be interpreted in light of a loose constellation of often incompatible standards, and less and less, measured against a man’s fidelity to truth or his righteousness.⁶⁹³ Suddenly grand action—(insert your own definition)—means more than the pursuit of wisdom or virtue, both of these things, irreparably rooted in thought. It became possible, perhaps for the first time, to admire another’s dedication to ideals one did not share, and in some cases, ideals one emphatically rejected.⁶⁹⁴ Only the arts that speak directly and so powerfully to sentiment could ever have achieved so thorough a revolution in our pattern of living.

⁶⁹³ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 10.

⁶⁹⁴ Berlin’s illustrative example here is Voltaire’s portrayal of Mohammed. It is, for us, possible to admire a person’s dedication to a standard of human virtue or excellence that contradicts our own entirely. The admiration many *bien-pensants* today reluctantly express for Palestinian terrorists – whom admirers, of course, call “freedom fighters” – is a modern, and equally illustrative, example.

The resultant toleration of significant disagreements on the most fundamental questions of justice and morality is perhaps the most impressive (i.e., the most difficult) achievement from the perspective of limited and liberal government. To accept with indifference that fellow citizens, family members, clansmen, etc.—people to whom one is united by powerful bonds of affection—will disagree profoundly on the most fundamental questions, and should in those cases be absolved of their fellows' and the political community's censure while maintaining all the protections and benefits of membership, is not in any way an automatic disposition. Where individuals care deeply for one another, one would rather expect great efforts to be made to save those who stray from the right path. Put another way, it is not unusual that those who care about us take an active interest in the morality or propriety of our decisions; it is far more unusual to expect that those who care most for us will muster passive indifference in the face of choices they believe to be profoundly misguided.

For all the respects in which the Enlightenment and the Romantic Movement's dominant minds disagreed, their effect coalesced in two respects of decisive political consequence. First, existing moral and intellectual sources of authority were undermined. Percy Shelley, a poet of the Romantic era, remarks quite beautifully in this connection as follows:

authority began to be shaken, not only in poetry but in the whole sphere of [arts and letters]... The subtle skepticism of Hume, the solemn irony of Gibbon, the daring paradoxes of Rousseau, and the biting ridicule of

Voltaire, directed the energies of four extraordinary minds to shake every portion of the reign of authority.⁶⁹⁵

Second, this erosion of confidence in old opinions and old sources of authoritative moral guidance (and even the possibility thereof) made possible, as the logic of Romantic ideas unfolded into relativism, a dramatic radicalization of individualism. Romanticism, by progressively divorcing the definition of worthy action from any single conception of virtue or excellence apprehended by the intellect, appears in practice to legitimate the freer and freer and freer pursuit of happiness. Thus, the private sphere continues to expand in the American mind.

When the American Founders spoke of the pursuit of happiness, happiness bore an essential connection to virtue understood along classical or Christian lines. By disconnecting the idea of happiness from notions of excellence (whether intellectual or moral), which depend for their continuation across generations on confident espousal by the regime's respected voices, liberty too came to take on a new meaning. Originally, liberty meant freedom from interference by the state, and implied a right to help guide the polity by patriotic participation in government; most important, perhaps, for the American founders it meant the freedom to pursue one's own salvation free of interference from the state. As Romantic ideas took hold, it came to mean the freedom to freely will and live a law apprehended by reason (or some other way) for oneself; for progressive political reformers, this justified active state support for individuals in the name of helping them to realize their potentials. Most recently, however, liberty has become an unlimited and unbridled license to indulge whatever passions, whatever inclinations, whatever

⁶⁹⁵ Percy Shelley, "Defense of Poetry," 56.

whims, one prefers, with the expectation that no one will judge the resultant behavior according to anything resembling an exacting moral standard. Where action matters most, and everything is permitted according to someone's conception of "noble," it should not come as a surprise that inclination and majority opinion will guide most people most of the time. Freedom from government interference remains important, but no more important than freedom from public disesteem. It is only necessary to mention this unhappy development because we are about to turn attention to Islamist thinkers who dwell on it.

In the end, religious toleration and exuberant pluralism, no less than our championing of every type of diversity today, is traceable to commitments to the dignity of the individual and the sufficiency of his or her moral and intellectual endowments. If these ideas were born during the Enlightenment and the Reformation, they have been decisively and importantly individualized and emotionalized by European Romanticism, a process that continues to this day. It is possible, however, that an intellectual movement that helps, in its infancy, to create a tolerant personality well suited to liberal democracy might, as it unfolds, become pernicious to upright representative government. In particular, those aspects of Christianity that helped keep democracy noble and good—from the confidence human beings are endowed with natural rights to the certainty human beings have a soul—seem to be undermined by the Romantic Movement's relativistic fruit. To put it another way, to account for the rise of the twenty-first century liberal personality is not to choreograph the only path to liberal democracy. Indeed, there may well be other, better, roads. Impressive modernizers in the Islamic world believe a reformed Islam is better

suited to serve as the ideational foundation for a pluralistic democratic regime than the West's reformed and romanticized post-Christian personality.

For our purposes at this point in the argument, however, the most important points are these: the sacred opinions that built the modern liberal personality (today, the postmodern personality) make liberal democracy possible *as we live it today*; and these intellectual commitments—what amount to our time's sacred opinions—did not come from nowhere. Nor, are they static. Rather, they are traceable to revolutions in political consciousness that have deep and deliberate roots, and whose inertia will continue to form and reform our sacred opinions as the movements themselves continue to evolve, develop, and fade away. As a civilization's sacred opinions change, so do the tenor and character of the regimes that can comfortably function within that civilization. Particular regimes, their political institutions and laws—and to the greatest extent in democratic times—cannot but continue to be animated by the spirit of the people.

CHAPTER VII

THE RESURGENCE AND RADICALIZATION OF ISLAM

In his signal work, *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington famously pointed to the revival of Islamic commitment in the latter part of the twentieth century as a historical event of massive, albeit generally underappreciated, significance. “The Islamic Resurgence,” he writes (insisting the capitalization is more than merited), is an event “at least as significant” as the French, Russian, and American Revolutions. “[I]n its extent and profundity,” he continues, it

is the latest phase in the adjustment of Islamic civilization to the West, an effort to find the “solution” not in Western ideologies but in Islam. It embodies acceptance of modernity, rejection of Western culture, and recommitment to Islam as the guide to life in the modern world.⁶⁹⁶

Nor was Huntington the first to notice the revival. Bernard Lewis anticipated Huntington’s title and argument in a short article he published in 1990 entitled “The Roots of Muslim Rage.” He wrote that the appearance of an increasingly assertive, and often violent, Anti-American movement claiming the authority of Islam represented “no less than a clash of civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both.”⁶⁹⁷ He went on to explain that a series of humiliations—military and non-military—at the hands of the West was galvanizing an increasingly large numbers of Muslims behind a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.

⁶⁹⁶ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 109.

⁶⁹⁷ Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage.” *The Atlantic*. September, 1990.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1990/09/the-roots-of-muslim-rage/4643/>

For a long time now there has been a rising tide of rebellion against this Western paramountcy, and a desire to reassert Muslim values and restore Muslim greatness. The Muslim has suffered successive stages of defeat. The first was his loss of domination in the world, to the advancing power of Russia and the West. The second was the undermining of his authority in his own country, through an invasion of foreign ideas and laws and ways of life and sometimes even foreign rulers or settlers, and the enfranchisement of native non-Muslim elements. The third—the last straw—was the challenge to his mastery in his own house, from emancipated women and rebellious children.⁶⁹⁸

Put another way, the West had barged into the Islamic world uninvited, and was transforming it not just from without, but from within. For centuries, progressive military defeats had eroded the size and power of the Ottoman Empire. After World War I, however, things got even worse. The great powers of Europe had carved up the empire leaving Muslims to live almost as subject peoples. Worst of all, Western ideas were creeping into everyday life in a way that undermined the one thing many Muslims believed could continue to distinguish the Islamic world from the West: its moral superiority. Fundamentalism, on this view, is the result of a civilization's desperate attempt to preserve, emphasize, and amplify the artifacts of its culture that can plausibly continue to define and ennoble it. In other terms, fidelity to literal and demanding interpretations of Islamic law became increasingly popular because they gave "aim and form" to the "resentment and anger of the Muslim masses at the forces that have devalued their traditional values and loyalties."⁶⁹⁹ Fundamentalists attributed the decline of the Islamic world not to the West's technological superiority, but to its own loss of faith, a deficiency the infiltration of Western ideas was in part responsible for. The solution: more intense fidelity to Islamic law.

⁶⁹⁸ Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage."

⁶⁹⁹ Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage."

This chapter will show that the renewed religious enthusiasm in the Islamic world is not simply attributable to resentment and frustration easily vented toward the West. Nor is it the result of the failure of our new value-neutral social sciences to guide political and moral life in a satisfactory and fulfilling way, as some have argued.⁷⁰⁰ It is, rather, the result of a powerful attack on the modern West in the name of pre-modern ideas about how the world should be organized, an attack led by intellectuals that has since gained considerable popular support. While the fact Islam has Resurged has long been recognized, the character of the resurgence – that is, its impact on the political consciousness of the Middle East and its significance to American interests in the region beyond terrorism – has yet to be fully articulated.

As we have seen, neoconservative supporters of regime change in Iraq, especially those who optimistically predicted it could be a harbinger of an Arab Spring, explicitly denied that this Resurgence carried any real political significance. Important members of the

⁷⁰⁰ In 1994, Giles Kepel made a similar, if more general, argument. He suggested that the apparent triumph of the attempt to separate religion and politics along Enlightenment lines reached its apogee sometime after World War II, but had begun to unravel by the mid-1970s (Giles Kepel, *The Revenge of God*, 1-2). Now came the inevitable counter-revolution; in the Muslim world,

A new religious approach took shape, aimed no longer at adapting to secular values but at recovering a sacred foundation for the organization of society—by changing society if necessary... the aim was no longer to modernize Islam but to ‘Islamize modernity.’

Although Kepel originally insisted his analysis applied to the Judeo-Christian world no less than the Islamic world, his subsequent research has focused on the most extreme case, the Resurgence of Islam. And while Kepel contended that new enthusiasms for religious commitments did not “spring from a dethronement of reason” but were rather the consequence of “a deep malaise in society that can no longer be interpreted in terms of our traditional categories of thought,” there is evidence that in the case of Islam, the rejection of Enlightenment ideas was especially conscious and deliberate, and at the same time, one of the most important sources of its contemporary weakness. Giles Kepel, *The Revenge of God*, 11.

Bush administration—including Douglas Feith, Paul Wolfowitz, David Frum, Richard Perle, Kenneth Adelman, Condoleezza Rice, and President Bush himself, in addition to the prominent public intellectuals who enthusiastically supported the effort to democratize Iraq (most important among them, Bill Kristol and Charles Krauthammer)—all adamantly denied that the region’s prevailing religion posed any special impediment to constitutional government.

This chapter investigates this key assumption in the context of the sacred opinions elucidated in Chapter 6. Its argument is that the resurgence of Islam is an event of considerable political significance for the West, particularly so from the perspective of U.S. foreign policy. For it represents not simply a revival or resurrection of religious sentiment in the Islamic world, but the dramatic radicalization and politicization of the opinions and social practices that guide, for all political purposes, a significant and increasing proportion of the world’s Muslims.

At this point, it is important to underline that Islam itself is not the problem. A radical manner of exegesis, favored by a small but assertive minority, is. As Ignaz Goldziher explained in his landmark study of Islamic law long before politicized Islam burst forth in its modern incarnation,

Whenever a religion derives its beliefs and practices from definite sacred texts, the exegesis devoted to those texts illustrates at once the legal and dogmatic development of the religion. In such cases, the history of religions is also a history of the interpretation of scripture. This is especially true of Islam...⁷⁰¹

⁷⁰¹ Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*. Trans. Andras Hamori and Ruth Hamori. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 55.

The interpretations of Islamic law discussed in this chapter, and so politically important today, are historically very unusual. Ali A. Allawi observes that the radical political and intellectual currents so potent today in the Muslim world “cannot seriously claim any continuity with the historical intellectual traditions of Islamic civilization. In this sense, fundamentalist Islam is an eminently modern phenomenon.”⁷⁰² As another scholar notes, the most extreme aims and statements of twentieth century Islamists “are inconceivable without the influence of Western totalitarianism.”⁷⁰³ Twentieth century theorists undertook a dramatic radicalization of even the most literalist theologians of the tradition, welding to that understanding modern—totalitarian—notions of the scope and role of the state, ideas borrowed from the atheistic political ideologies that convulsed the West in the twentieth century. Speaking of the politicization of Shiite Islam, in particular, Said Amir Arjomand notes that this “pouring of Islam into the ideological framework borrowed from Marxism amounted to a ‘colossal redefinition of Islam.’”⁷⁰⁴ For most of history, Islam’s jurists expressly permitted a disjuncture between the totalitarian demands of *sharia* in theory, and the extent of the state’s enforcement of Islamic law in practice. In some instances, this even permitted relatively limited government.

It should go without saying, moreover, that Islamists—that is, those attempt to inject literalist interpretations of the Qur’an and the Sunna into politics (what is also referred to

⁷⁰² Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 38.

⁷⁰³ Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind* (Washington, D.C.: Intercollegiate Studies Institute Press, 2010), 181.

⁷⁰⁴ Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 74.

as politicized Islam)⁷⁰⁵—do not speak for all Muslims. Nonetheless, it remains the case that the most domineering manner of interpreting a legal code, especially one that claims the authority of God, can be of greater *political* consequence than those that strive for honest or pious interpretation of sacred texts, even where the domineering and disfiguring interpretations are not the most pervasive.⁷⁰⁶ To put it another way, one can be persuaded that Islam has been hijacked, perverted, radicalized, and corrupted by a minority seeking to use its authority to inspire terrorists and enliven political movements, while remaining simultaneously convinced that the minority matters most from the perspective of U.S. foreign policy. The question is not whether their interpretations are correct, but whether they are sufficiently powerful to affect this country's pursuit of its interests in the Arab-Islamic world.

While there have almost always been Islamic theorists who advocate ultra-literalist interpretation of Islam's holy books, this chapter means to show that their influence over the zeitgeist of the Arab-Islamic world has increased significantly over the course of the twentieth century thanks largely to the deliberate efforts of a handful of twentieth century theorists. From the perspective of constitutional democracy and the possibility of modern and moderate government in the Middle East, their impact has been unambiguously

⁷⁰⁵ Ahmed Bouzid helpfully defines Islamism as “the injection of Islam in society and politics, whether by the state or by popular movements.” Ahmed Bouzid, *Man, Society, and Knowledge in the Islamist Discourse of Sayyid Qutb*. Dissertation submitted to VPI. April, 1998., 5.

⁷⁰⁶ Joseph Schacht makes this point in his seminal study of Islamic law in somewhat more technical language. Having pointed out that Islamic legal theorists typically recognize four bases or principles of Islamic law—the Qur'an, the *sunna* of the Prophet, reasoning by analogy, and the consensus of the scholarly community—he points out that this latter source, the *ijma*, “is the decisive instance; it guarantees the authenticity of the two material sources and determines their correct interpretation” (Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law*, 114). I would only add that the word “correct” should probably be substituted with “prevailing” or “dominant”.

pernicious. The interpretations of Islamic law that are part and parcel of the Islamic Resurgence are antithetical to the sacred opinions necessary to sustain a liberal democracy. As Andrew McCarthy cogently explains: “Fundamentalist strains of Islam... have been developed by extraordinary minds. It is not that these Muslims fail to comprehend our principles; they reject them. They have an entirely different conception of the good life.”⁷⁰⁷ What Westerners value—above all, limited government, freedom, and the right to participate in the law-making process—is not esteemed on the Islamist view. In fact, the sacred opinions integral to liberal democracy are rejected one and all. On the Salafi interpretation, Islam is a totalitarian legal code that manages every aspect of an individual’s life; the propriety of a separation of church and state is resolutely denied; legislation established on the principle of consent is equated to the basest form of slavery; freedom is defined as complete submission of mind to revealed law; and the principle of universal political and moral equality is rejected out of hand. To the extent opinions such as these prevail, liberal democracy cannot.

Most date the Resurgence and Radicalization of Islam to the 1970s. There are obvious reasons for this: the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973 presaged a decade of increased Islam-inspired violence leading up to the events of 1979. That year marked both the Iranian Revolution and the beginning of the *mujahideen* resistance to the Soviet Union, which had invaded Afghanistan. The decades following were characterized by a progressive intensification of violence against Western targets perpetuated in the name of

⁷⁰⁷ Andrew McCarthy, “A Dangerous Delusion,” *National Review Online*, 4 September, 2009. <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/228178/dangerous-delusion/andrew-c-mccarthy?pg=4>

Islam culminating in the events of 11 September, 2001. And yet, to date the Resurgence of Islam to these momentous events is symptomatic of an inadequate understanding of the character and origin of the fundamentalist movement. While it is certainly true that Egypt's ignominious defeat at the hand of Israel in 1967, and the difficult decades that followed, played a role in *popularizing* more conservative strains of Islamic thought, active efforts to rehabilitate and spread the ideas themselves can be traced back to 1928, and indeed yet further. 1928 is important because it is the year the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt. The Brotherhood has done more to spread the opinions of the Resurgence than any other contributing factor. Properly understood, moreover, the Resurgence is not defined by spectacular political events, but by the ideas it has promulgated. Those ideas, in turn, have transformed the moral-political outlook of the region. By their deliberate efforts to transform the region's political consciousness, Salafi thinkers have also changed the region's political possibilities. In fact, this is precisely what they set out to do.

To understand how, one must begin almost one hundred years ago. The end of World War I led to Atatürk's abolition of the Caliphate and the British occupation of Egypt. These events, viewed by Muslims across the Middle East as assaults on the Islamic world that threatened its continuation as a distinct civilization, prompted a cadre of thinkers to revitalize and disseminate the literalist interpretative approach of Ibn Taymiyya (1263⁷⁰⁸-

⁷⁰⁸ cf. Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). 94; Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 116.

1328), a thirteenth century Sunni thinker.⁷⁰⁹ His brand of Islam was “entirely Sharia-defined”: he advocated absolute literalness of interpretation; he rejected the spiritual focus of the Sufi orders; and he was “implacably hostile and aggressive” toward the Shiite for what he viewed as their idolatry.⁷¹⁰ Taymiyya’s influence, though he had many followers during his own lifetime, waned quickly after his death. In 1910, the great German scholar of Islam, Ignaz Goldziher, could write (in what remains a seminal study of Islamic theology and law) that the Hanbali school of legal thought—with which Taymiyya is associated—was on the verge of extinction: “Finally, the school of the *imam* Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855) is represented today in relatively the smallest numbers [of the four main Sunni schools].”⁷¹¹ And yet, Ibn Taymiyya’s arguments in favor of absolute obedience to the Qur’an and the Sunna—to the utter exclusion of centuries of scholarly commentary, some of it moderating—form today (in a further radicalized form) one of the most important roots of politicized Islam.⁷¹²

Taymiyya’s approach to Qur’anic interpretation was rehabilitated first by Abd el-Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi movement in eighteenth century Arabia, and later by Rashid Rida in Egypt, an early champion of the Salafi movement active at the end of the nineteenth century into the twentieth. Rida’s efforts in Egypt yielded greater dividends. His widely read *al-Manar* newspaper became an influential pan-Islamic vehicle

⁷⁰⁹ Ibn Taymiyya is “revered by today’s Islamists” for his hyper-literal approach. cf. Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 62.

⁷¹⁰ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 116-117.

⁷¹¹ Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*. Trans. Andras Hamori and Ruth Hamori. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 49.

⁷¹² Ali Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 118.

for fundamentalist opinions.⁷¹³ The paper, along with Salafi bookshops in Cairo, were, for a time, the center of gravity in a relatively small fundamentalist universe. Hasan al-Banna, one of the most important modern Islamists, was an avid reader of *al-Manar* in his early years. Not only did he seek out its editors, ultimately to take over its publication; he, more than any other single figure, is responsible for the dramatic growth of the movement over the course of the twentieth century.⁷¹⁴

An Egyptian schoolteacher by profession, and active politically during the early twentieth century, al-Banna's most important legacy is the organization he founded in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood. Through it, he devoted his life and energies to reviving and purifying Islam. His aim was a noble one: he sought to help build just and pious communities in a world which, dominated by the Western powers, seemed neither just nor pious. He conceived of the project in expressly anti-Western terms, as a direct response to, and repudiation of, the moral-political outlook of the North-Atlantic states. In the name of fidelity to Islam's founding tenets, al-Banna came to reject virtually every distinctive feature of liberal democracy: nationalism, state sovereignty on a secular basis, the confinement of religion to a limited political sphere, unfettered capitalism, a constitutional separation of powers, the notion that social and political equality mandate government according to consent in which participation is widespread, the primacy of the individual and his rights, the notion that individuals are entitled to pursue happiness as they themselves define it within a very generous sphere protected by law.

⁷¹³ Ali Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 117.

⁷¹⁴ Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 23, 186, 322.

The Islamic revival he sought to catalyze would, he believed, exceed in scope both the French and Russian Revolutions.⁷¹⁵ Al-Banna aimed not simply to lay down new organizing laws; he sought nothing less than to bring Egypt's moral, intellectual, and political life into harmony with a purified interpretation of Islamic law, which is to say, to subordinate all aspects of life to strict religious decrees. In an essay entitled "Our Mission," al-Banna explains that "Islam is an all- embracing concept which regulates every aspect of life, adjudicating on every one its concerns and prescribing for it a solid and rigorous order."⁷¹⁶

Al-Banna and those who celebrate him today understand, above all perhaps, the high importance of education broadly construed: they are conscious, as most in the West are not, that regimes function properly only where their criminal, civil, and foundational laws are supported by the morals, habits, and sacred opinions of the people. To build an Islamic state on the most solid foundation possible, one begins by shaping the beliefs and the manner of worship of the *umma*. Al-Banna recognized (in direct contradistinction to those who led the U.S. endeavor to build a liberal democracy in Iraq!) that the possibility of successful political reform rests first and foremost on soul-craft: where the opinions and social habits internalized by the citizens (or subjects) of the regime do not support it, no form of government can persist except by repression and force. As the Brotherhood explained in a 1951 Egyptian periodical, *al-Da'wa*, "Law does not perform its function

⁷¹⁵ Ehud Rosen, "The Muslim Brotherhood's Concept of Education," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Volume 8 (2008), 117.

⁷¹⁶ Hassan al-Banna, "Our Mission" in *Six Tracts of Hasan al-Banna*, Majmu At Rasa Trans. (I.I.F.S.O, 2006), 61.

unless it rests on principles accepted by the people and in which the individuals and societies have faith... Unless it is this, it cannot fulfill its function.”⁷¹⁷

Building Fully Islamic Personalities

For this reason al-Banna emphasized widespread proselytizing. The Muslim Brotherhood, an organization of global reach today, was explicitly tasked with the “shaping of fully Islamic personalities”—of shaping souls now to prepare society for *bottom-up* political reform in time.⁷¹⁸ According to al-Banna’s biographer, a verse from the Qur’an emphasizing the importance of individual spiritual reform as a way to currying God’s favor for the sake of wider political reform became a favorite: “Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls).”⁷¹⁹ As al-Banna explained in 1933, a “renascent nation” needs a very special kind of education; teaching literacy, history, and concrete skills is not sufficient.

The solution is the education and moulding of the souls of the nation in order to create a strong moral immunity, from and superior principles and a strong and steadfast ideology. This is the best and fastest way to achieve the nation’s goals and aspirations, and it is therefore our aim and the reason for our existence. It goes beyond the mere founding of schools, factories and institutions, it is the ‘founding’ of souls.⁷²⁰

Lest it be thought the organization has strayed far from its roots, consider a recent initiative. On its (Arab-language) website, the Brotherhood’s recent “Reform Initiative,”

⁷¹⁷ Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 236.

⁷¹⁸ Ehud Rosen, “The Muslim Brotherhood’s Concept of Education,” 118.

⁷¹⁹ Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt*, (New York: Ithaca Press, 2006), 83.

⁷²⁰ Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt*, 67.

launched in March 2004, expresses the organization's ultimate goal in terms al-Banna might himself have put forth at the organization's inception:

We have a clear mission—to implement Allah's law, on the basis of our belief that it is the real, effective, way out of all our problems—domestic or external, political, economic, social or cultural. That is to be achieved by forming the Muslim individual, the Muslim home, the Muslim government, and the state which will lead the Islamic states, reunite the scattered Muslims, restore their glory, retrieve for them their lost lands and stolen homelands, and carry the banner of the call to Allah in order to bless the world with Islam's teachings.⁷²¹

Only after “fully Islamic personalities” have been molded in large numbers can an Islamic state or states—dedicated to enforcing *sharia*—be durably and successfully erected. Political reform presumes prior moral reform. And moral reform takes time. The ultimate political goal of fundamentalist Islam is nothing less than the reestablishment of an expansionist pan-Islamic Caliphate on the strongest possible moral foundations. Such an ambition will seem far-fetched to Western audiences with the political attention span of an election cycle. For the Brotherhood, however, it simply requires patience. As Mustafa Mashhur, the Supreme Guide or official leader of the Egyptian Brotherhood from 1996 through 2002 explains in a work called “The Laws of Da’wa,”

He [Hassan al-Banna] felt the grave danger overshadowing the Muslims and the urgent need and obligation which Islam places on every Muslim, man and woman, to act in order to restore the Islamic Caliphate and reestablish the Islamic State on strong foundations.⁷²²

⁷²¹ Israel Elad Altman, “The Crisis of the Arab Brotherhood,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 6 (2007), 29-47.

⁷²² Mustafa Mashhur, “The Laws of Da’wa,” 6.

Later in the work, he explicitly acknowledges that the project is not a short one, then goes on to insist the Brotherhood has not grown tired or weary in the face of adversity:

[T]he [Muslim] Brotherhood is not rushed by youth's enthusiasm into immature and unplanned action which will not alter the bad reality and may even harm the Islamic activity, and will benefit the people of falsehood...

The [Muslim] Brothers know that hastiness without proper preparedness may be like an aborted [action]. Likewise, they know that the negligence and hesitation after the right time [for *Jihad*] has come... might bring spiritual death.⁷²³

A previous Supreme Guide made a similar point, emphasizing education in times political reform is impossible.

The general atmosphere [at present] is not conducive to the establishment of an Islamic state... The most important thing is to work for the implementation of the Islamic Shari'ah and to try to persuade the authorities to abolish the freedom-restricting laws... Everything can be done on [the basis of the Shari'ah] from education to the methods of government. Islam should govern all aspects of activity. That is what we ask for.⁷²⁴

The Brotherhood's progress toward their goal of educating disseminating this manner of belief has been nothing short of astonishing. Thanks to virtually limitless Saudi funding, and the Salafi takeover of important universities in Saudi Arabia and North Africa in the 1960s and 1970s,⁷²⁵ schools and mosques inspired by the Brotherhood's aims exercise a near-monopoly over the education of young Muslims in vast communities throughout the Islamic world, its reach extending even to neighborhoods in London, Paris, and Toronto. Since the 1980s, a steady stream of "scholars" steeped in radical Islamist ideas has literally spread out across the Middle East and North Africa, some as far as the immigrant

⁷²³ Mustafa Mashhur, "The Laws of Da'wa," 7.

⁷²⁴ Quoted in Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, 39-40.

⁷²⁵ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 78.

neighborhoods of the major European metropolises.⁷²⁶ Their quest to gain adherents was aided by the youth bulge; young people, especially young men, are most likely to be seduced by revolutionary fervor and there were more of them than ever. The texts that advance the attendant ideas are widely available from mosques and on an ever-multiplying number of websites, many of them hosted by Muslim Student Associations and similar organizations in the West.

“Religious outreach activities,” the deliberate dissemination of literalist, sometimes violent, Islamic practice, has been a self-conscious aim of the Saudi government since the 1960s.⁷²⁷ According to one prominent scholar Islamism, “there is not a single significant Muslim population in the world that has been untouched by Saudi funding,” the effect, “mostly... negative.”⁷²⁸ The total financial contribution of the Saudi state and wealthy Saudi oil tycoons to Salafi organizations around the world is thought to be upwards of 4 billion dollars per year.⁷²⁹ Pervez Hoodbhoy, a Pakistani nuclear Physicist, claims radical interpretations of Islam are much stronger than most recognize:

Fundamentalist movements have come to dominate intellectual discourse in key Muslim countries and the Muslim modernist movement, which emphasized Islam’s compatibility with science and rationalism, has lost its cultural and ideological hegemony. The modernist has been effectively banished from the political and cultural scene and the modern educational system, which was nascent 50 years ago, has visibly collapsed in key Islamic countries. Orthodoxy has arrogated to itself the task of guiding the

⁷²⁶ Giles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2004), 167.

⁷²⁷ RAND, *The Muslim World After 9/11* (Santa Monica: RAND Corp., 2004), 41.

⁷²⁸ Reza Azlan, as quoted in “Unusual guests, a most unusual host,” *The Economist*, 24 July, 2008. <http://www.economist.com/node/11792340>

⁷²⁹ Max Singer, “The potential dangers of a ‘real’ jihad.” *Radical Islam and International Security*. Hillel Frisch and Efraim Inbar, Eds. (New York: Routledge, 2008.) 172.

destiny of Muslims. But their prescription for society is an invitation to catastrophe and possibly to a new Dark Age for Muslims.⁷³⁰

The result of this “triumph” of the Wahhabi/Salafi school of interpretation has been characterized by at least two scholars as “the closing of the Islamic mind” in modern times.⁷³¹ A further consequence of the fundamentalists’ intellectual victory: millions of hearts and minds dedicated to the literalist species of Islam (for moral and political purposes) Hassan al-Banna sought to rehabilitate. Issam al-Aryan, one of the Brotherhood’s leaders, recently explained that over time “reforming the Muslim individual, the Muslim home and the Muslim society” leads to “restoring the international entity... and ends with being masters of the world through guidance and preaching.”⁷³²

Having briefly outlined the ongoing intellectual event referred to as the Resurgence of Islam, this chapter investigates the dominant tenets of the three most widely read twentieth century Salafi theorists—Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi—with an eye toward the compatibility (more often, the incompatibility) of their teachings and the sacred opinions of a democratic citizenry as identified in Chapter 6. While the Muslim Brotherhood has repudiated violence, other aspects of the ideology put forth by these thinkers have been popularized by Brotherhood-affiliated organizations and the more radical groups that have sprung from it. Together, their teachings

⁷³⁰ Hoodbhoy, *Islam and Science* (Zed Books, 1991), 135.

⁷³¹ Ali Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*. 120. C.f., Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*.

⁷³² Israel Elad Altman, “The Crisis of the Arab Brotherhood,” 29.

constitute “the new writ” of Islamism, both in their *jihadist* and politicized forms.⁷³³

Chapter 8 has two related purposes that build on the present discussion. First, it examines the political-historical circumstances that abetted the wide dissemination of these views. For just as Tocqueville acknowledges that democracy’s sacred opinions could not have gained traction in the sixteenth century, so we must recognize that “Islamism... is not a sudden phenomenon, but one that ebbed and flowed depending on immediate political machinations.”⁷³⁴ Political events, some of them catalyzed by Western powers, made possible a sudden shift in the Sunni world’s intellectual and moral centre of gravity.⁷³⁵ Second, Chapter 8 ends with a brief consideration of the (ultimately failed) efforts of those thinkers who sought to liberalize or reform Islam in order to render it more compatible with the modern world and they reasons they failed.⁷³⁶

⁷³³ Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 177.

⁷³⁴ Ahmed Bouzid, *Man, Society, And Knowledge in the Islamists Discourse of Sayyid Qutb*, 5.

⁷³⁵ Put another way, the Anti-Americanism and Anti-Western animus so strong in the Arab-Islamic world has roots that run much deeper than contemporary policies and personalities. But America’s unconditional support for Israel, its generous military and financial support for dictators throughout the Middle East, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the bellicose rhetoric of President Bush—while none of these things constitute the root of the problem, they do increase the resonance of politicized Islam. (cf. Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 118).

⁷³⁶ Before we can consider the most radical teachings of these theorists, however, two further disclaimers are in order. In the West today, many dismiss the Salafi movement as evil out of hand: we associate Shari’a primarily with its brutal corporeal punishments, politicized Islam with social conservatism or the subjugation of women, and jihadist Islam with terrorism driven by a fascistic or totalitarian impulse. To unquestioningly adopt this caricature is to risk seriously misunderstanding the Islamic Resurgence. Tempting though it may be, it cannot be denied that the intellectual architects of the Salafi movement had worthy, even highly honorable, intentions. They intended to remove centuries of corruption from the practice of Islam, and to construct a regime or regimes utterly faithful to God’s commands. Their vision is not “nihilistic” (aiming at destruction without purpose, as we so often hear it claimed today); indeed, Islamist thinkers have very concrete aims suffused with moral confidence. They are concerned, above all, with virtue or human excellence of a particular type. They sought to create the perfect Islamic man or subject, and ultimately the perfect Islamic state or states, and they did so from a desire to see peace, justice, and piety instantiated in a world that seemed to them increasingly hostile to Islam, what

they believed to be the precondition of virtue and excellence in the world. It is a tragic truth of history that utopian projects have been indistinguishable from totalitarian projects; perhaps it is inevitable that this be so where fallen men are in charge. Even so, a willingness to understand the movement through its founders' eyes, at least as the point of departure, is important. It is not equivalent to taking an uncritical attitude toward that movement; it is, on the contrary, the prerequisite of a truly informed criticism.

Second, some will say that it is impolite, improper, politically incorrect, or even impossible, for a Westerner—in this case, a proud liberal (in the old sense of that term)—to comment on prevailing currents in Islamic thought and their relationship to liberal democracy. Reservations of this sort, very prevalent today, stem from a number of things. Our noble commitment to tolerance and freedom of conscience—so important to our form of government—can lead one to deny the possibility of making any sort of normative evaluation. Taught to tolerate so much, we are losing confidence in the bases or standards that would permit us to distinguish what is properly tolerable from that which is properly intolerable. Liberal democracy, however, cannot afford to be indifferent to ideologies that reject its sacred opinions; it certainly cannot be founded where those ideas do not hold sway.

Moreover, those who retain a confidence in the righteousness of our way of life in the West have a duty to defend it, and to promote it, given the generous freedom we have to do so. As Bernard Lewis has written,

There was a time when scholars and other writers in communist Eastern Europe relied on writers and publishers in the free West to speak the truth about their history, their culture, and their predicament. Today it is those who told the truth, not those who concealed or denied it, who are respected and welcomed in these countries. Historians in free countries have a moral and professional obligation not to shrink the difficult issues and subjects that some people would place under a sort of taboo; not to submit to voluntary censorship, but to deal with these matters fairly, honestly, without apologetics, without polemic, and, of course, competently. Those who enjoy freedom have a moral obligation to use that freedom for those who do not possess it. We live in a time when great efforts have been made, and continue to be made to falsify the record of the past and to make history a tool of propaganda; when governments, religious movements, political parties, and sectional groups of every kind are busy rewriting history as they would wish it to have been, as they would like their followers to believe that it was. All this is very dangerous indeed, to ourselves and to others, however we may define otherness - dangerous to our common humanity. Because, make no mistake, those who are unwilling to confront the past will be unable to understand the present and unfit to face the future. (Bernard Lewis, "Other People's History," in *Islam in History*).

Jihadist Islam and Politicized Islam

Sayyid Qutb, a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt mid-century, did more than any other individual to radicalize Al-Banna's teachings. He was imprisoned and later executed in 1966 by Nasser's regime for his political activities and the extremist views his popular works were popularizing. Though Qutb's political influence during his lifetime was impressive, his ideas have exerted a much greater effect in the decades since his death. He influenced Al-Qaeda's top leaders directly: Ayman Zawahiri was one of his students, and through the latter's mentorship, Qutb's thought exerted a deep influence on Osama Bin Laden as well. Like al-Banna, Qutb worked for the establishment of an Islamic state or states governed entirely according to *sharia*. And like al-Banna, he placed high emphasis on the importance of education. Unlike al-Banna, however, he put forth a justification for violent jihad against the West as well as rulers in the Islamic world who were not working to bring about the establishment of a *sharia*, literally construed.

Put another way, if Al-Banna and Qutb were motivated by similar aims, they imagined attaining them by different roads, and have therefore had somewhat different effects. At the risk of oversimplifying the difference, it is Qutb's thought that has inspired *jihadist* Islam; Al-Banna's, politicized Islam. Violent Islamists cite Qutb's criticism of the West and its pervasive influence on politics and morals in Arab states to justify terrorism. One

commentator, writing in the *New York Times* not long after 9/11, went so far as to label Qutb “The Philosopher of Islamic Terror.”⁷³⁷

Qutb radicalized many aspects of al-Banna’s thought, and thus, deeply affected politicized Islam; but his most spectacular contribution is the rehabilitation and popularization of the idea that the contemporary Islamic world could be declared *jahilliya*—plagued by a ubiquitous ignorance reminiscent of Arabia before the spread of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad had first to alleviate the condition (by force and conquest) before fully Islamic communities could be given laws. The West’s corruption of everything—the ubiquitous nihilism and materialism spread by economic and military conquest without historical precedent—had come to constitute an invincible impediment to the proselytizing approach al-Banna preferred. For Qutb, “All Jewish and Christian societies today are... jahili societies”;⁷³⁸ in fact, “the jahili society is any society other than the Muslim society; and if we want a more specific definition, we may say that any society is a jahili society which does not dedicate itself to submission to God alone.”⁷³⁹ Thus it follow that “Islam has a right to remove all those obstacles which are in its path so that it may address human reason and intuition with no interference and opposition from political systems.”⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁷ Paul Berman, “The Philosopher of Islamic Terror.” *The New York Times*, 23 March, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/23/magazine/the-philosopher-of-islamic-terror.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

⁷³⁸ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (SIME Journal Trans., <http://majalla.org/>), 76; cf., 87.

⁷³⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 74.

⁷⁴⁰ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 67.

It would be difficult to overstate the significance of his radical new teaching. The traditional schools of Islamic law had forbidden rebellion against temporal rulers, even where they transgressed against Islam. If commanded to sin, a Muslim was not obliged to obey the ruler; but neither did Islamic jurists countenance revolution against insufficiently Islamic political regimes. Injunctions against supporting civil strife (*fitna*) – whether by words or by deeds – were forceful and unambiguous.⁷⁴¹ Sayyid Qutb set for himself an audacious goal: “to legitimize revolt in terms of mainstream Sunni thought.”⁷⁴²

Qutb’s justified this radical departure from orthodoxy by claiming that Western “political systems” represented an imminent threat to Islamic civilization. Thanks to Western weapons and capital, Islamic lands were ruled by godless tyrants; worse, Western ideas—about the relationship between religion and politics, man’s place in the universe and relationship to God, even the structure of the family—had been invading the Islamic world for centuries.⁷⁴³ For this reason, in addition to Western power and its godless ideologies, Qutbists fiercely oppose the region’s corrupt rulers as well as virtually all modern Qur’anic interpretation and commentary.⁷⁴⁴ That the Islamic world has fallen into a condition of barbarity and ignorance justifies—*nay, demands*—violent *jihad* against Arab rulers (for despoiling Islam by adopting the outer trappings of modernity), foreign powers operating on holy soil (for supporting the corruption), even adherents to apostate strains of Islam and members of other religions (for the crime of spreading disbelief).

⁷⁴¹ Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 91.

⁷⁴² Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 92.

⁷⁴³ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 11, 53.

⁷⁴⁴ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 65.

Qutbists believe contemporary conditions mandate violent *jihad* insofar as the prevailing barbarism makes a return to wholesome Islamic life impossible by gentler means; it becomes a religious duty to remove every impediment to the dissemination of the kind of literal interpretation of Islamic law his writings celebrate. Islam, moreover is a catholic religion in the sense of its being universal. Qutb emphasizes again and again that “It is essential for mankind to have new leadership”:⁷⁴⁵ “Islam [is] a universal message, ordained... as the religion for the whole of mankind,” one that “cannot be restricted within any geographical or racial limits.” In other words, “Jihad in Islam is simply a name for striving to make this system of life dominant in the World.”⁷⁴⁶

The traditional seat of Islamic civilization, the Arab world, is the first concern. Ultimately, however, Islam “strives... to abolish all those systems and government which are based on the rule of man over men,” chief among these, the Western democracies.⁷⁴⁷ He goes so far as to assert “the foremost duty of Islam in this world is to depose Jahiliyyah from the leadership of men, and to s the leadership into its own hands and enforce the particular way of life which is its permanent feature.”⁷⁴⁸ Thus it is that organizations like *Al-Qaeda* came to understand their mission in Messianic terms. Qutb even warns against “defeatist-type people” who contend *jihad* in Islam is to be interpreted as countenancing a non-violent spiritual struggle or defensive war. On the contrary,

When writers with defeatist and apologetic mentalities write about ‘Jihad in Islam,’ trying to remove this ‘blot’ from Islam, then they are mixing up

⁷⁴⁵ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 2, 9, 66.

⁷⁴⁶ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 69.

⁷⁴⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 54.

⁷⁴⁸ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 117.

two things: first, that this religion forbids the imposition of belief by force, as is clear from the verse, “There is no compulsion in religion (2:256), while on the other hand it tries to annihilate all those political and material powers which stand between people and Islam, which force one people to bow before another people and prevent them from accepting the sovereignty of God. These two principles have no relation to one another nor is there room to mix them.”⁷⁴⁹

In other words, it is a duty to “annihilate all those political and material powers” which stand in the way of the establishment of an Islamic state devoted to enforcing *sharia*.

It is not for nothing that Qutb has been called “a seminal thinker[] in Islamism,”⁷⁵⁰ “the most potent of the religious intellectuals,”⁷⁵¹ and “one of the most influential architects of contemporary Islamist political thought.”⁷⁵² He provided “the ideology incarnated in the terrorist organization that allows terrorists” to advance “murder to the level of a moral principle”; Qutb’s line of argument “is the source of their moral legitimacy.” As Robert Reilly continues, “Without it, they or their organizations cannot exist.”⁷⁵³ Or, to put it another way, “terrorists are produced by a totalitarian ideology justifying terrorism. That is its ‘root cause’.”⁷⁵⁴ Absent the concept of *jahilliya*, by which Qutb marshaled a divine justification in defense of the slaughter of innocents, Islamic terrorism would not be the problem it is today. His radical new exegesis of sacred texts was all the more significant for anchoring “its political certainties in the ineffable text of the Quran” which gave his

⁷⁴⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 51.

⁷⁵⁰ Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 176.

⁷⁵¹ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 74.

⁷⁵² *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, 127.

⁷⁵³ Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 184.

⁷⁵⁴ Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 198.

call for violent *jihad* “a legitimacy in the eyes of the wide Muslim public which the movement would not have enjoyed otherwise.”⁷⁵⁵

The *jihadist* contours of Qutb’s thought have been explored by Western scholars and its political consequences are relatively well appreciated today. For obvious reasons, scholars in the West focused on his criticism of the West as justification for and inspiration to terrorism in the years following 9/11. While it is certainly the case that far too many policymakers continue to cling to the belief that U.S. foreign and economic policy is the root cause of terrorism—whether American intervention in the Middle East, or its support for Israel, or the depressed socio-economic conditions for which capitalism and the neo-imperialist economic policies of the West are blamed—the most spectacular impact of Qutb’s ideology has at least been explained to Western audiences that are willing to listen.

The Resurgence of Islam is relevant to U.S. foreign policy in ways that extend well beyond terrorism, however. Islamism’s wider political significance is best demonstrated by the Muslim Brotherhood and its proselytizing mission. The Brotherhood has two main branches: an expressly political branch (very active in Jordan and Egypt, and the basis of Hamas in Gaza), and a missionary branch. The first, much less radical than those who have answered Qutb’s calls for violent *jihad*, ostensibly accept the modern state system and embrace some of its institutions, at least those that represent a potential road to political influence or authority. The second, proselytizing, branch (which best reflects Al-Banna’s vision) inspires tepid concern in the West today, probably because Westerners

⁷⁵⁵ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 79.

are inclined to view it through a distinctly liberal lens—one that tolerates very much from a well-meaning commitment not to judge what others believe on freedom or conscience grounds.

And yet, the branch of the Brotherhood devoted to missionary work has realized Al-Banna's vision to astonishing extent, creating individuals, families, and communities in massive numbers wholly committed to living according to a literal interpretation of Islam's holy texts—as well as to their further dissemination—throughout the Arab Middle East and North Africa. By creating fully Islamic personalities in sufficient numbers, moreover, to constitute a majority (or at least an intimidating plurality) in some countries, this comparatively innocuous accomplishment of the Brotherhood has begun to exert a staggering political influence. That effect will be magnified—not diminished—the more participatory the region's governments become.

The 2006 elections in Gaza is but another reminder that where a considerable faction of the citizenry is dedicated to propositions popularized by Salafi thinkers, the people tend not to use their democratic rights, privileges, and legislative authority to support the species of liberal government Western audiences identify with democratic institutions. In sum, where guiding moral and political convictions deeply internalized by the people are antithetical to the sacred opinions upon which constitutional government in the West has been built, democratic elections will yield consistently illiberal, and often destabilizing, results. Political instability is a serious possibility because a government elected on an ideological platform, whose supporters are above all devoted to seeing that ideology realized, might well find they have an interest in acting in ways that undermine regional

stability. For instance, incoming Salafi members of Egypt's popularly elected parliament have mused publicly about revising Egypt's peace treaty with Israel.

Salafi Islam as a Totalitarian Code and the Impossibility of a Private Sphere

We take for granted today that a regime based on consent and devoted to the establishment and protection of a generous personal sphere within which autonomous individuals are free to behave as they like, free of the state's interference, is the only legitimate form of political regime. Westerners believe it obvious—they “know”—that they have a right to the unencumbered pursuit of happiness so long as they do not harm anyone along the way. It is not too much to say that safeguarding the establishment of such a sphere—in which the individual is free to pursue happiness however he or she defines it—is a guiding purpose of liberalism in the modern age and is taken to be the sole purpose of our form government. As we have seen, beliefs such as these did not come from nowhere.

On the Salafi understanding, in contrast, Islamic law is all-encompassing in scope and the coercive authority of the state exists to enforce laws that reach deep into the lives of individuals. Al-Banna's definition of Islam is oft-repeated to make this point: Islam is nothing like Christianity (post-Reformation) according to which an individual's private, spiritual, relationship with God is paramount; rather, Islam is “creed and state, book and

sword, and a way of life.”⁷⁵⁶ As Sayyid Qutb proudly and emphatically explains, Islam, properly understood, is nothing less than a totalitarian code according to which every aspect of life is to be ordered; human life is redeemed in proportion to the degree the individual subordinates himself to religious decrees. Triumphant assertions that Islamic law determines every facet of life litter Qutb’s work: Muslims should “arrange [their] lives solely according to... the Book of God”; “From [the Qur’an] we must also derive our concepts of life, our principles of government, politics, economics, and all other aspects of life”; “people should devote their entire lives in submission to God, should not decide any affair on their own”; “The only principle on which the totality of human life is to be based is God’s religion and its system of life. If this principle is absent, the very first pillar of Islam... will not be established nor its real influence felt.”⁷⁵⁷

“Totalitarian” is not, on this understanding, equivalent to “tyrannical.” That is, deprivation of freedom by government (totalitarianism) is not the worst thing a government can do. In fact, as not a few commentators have underlined, there is no Arabic word for freedom in the sense the West understands the term.⁷⁵⁸ The term for “freedom” traditionally designates a rather narrow concept: freedom is the condition opposite servitude. It connotes the absence of physical restraint, not the harmony of an individual’s unfettered mind with his will; the term freedom, in other words, has in Arabic nothing to do with an individual’s capacity to author his own thoughts and actions.

⁷⁵⁶ RAND, *The Muslim World After 9/11*, 25.

⁷⁵⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 11-15, 41, 79.

⁷⁵⁸ Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*; cf. Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*.

The opposite of a tyrannical government is not, therefore, a free society; for the opposite of tyrannical rule can also be believed to be just rule. Where freedom is not the cardinal political ideal, totalitarian regimes can be just. Just rule can, in fact, *require* totalitarian methods. On this understanding, a just regime is the kind of regime that nudges and coerces—by the totality of its laws and its cultural influences—the people living in common under its laws to become just, pious, noble, good, etc. As we have seen in the Christian context, however, where men claim God’s authority for laws instituted on earth, the result is usually a corruption of both religion and politics.

Salafi thinkers agree that *sharia* was properly enforced under the rightly-guided Caliphs. The problem, Qutb explains, is that only the first generations of Muslims properly appreciated “that every moment of their lives was under the continuous guidance and direction of the Almighty Creator.”⁷⁵⁹ Purifying Islam requires a renewed commitment among the community of Muslims to strictly literal interpretation of the Books of God for they are the *only* legitimate source from which to derive “our concepts of life, our principles of government, politics, economics and all other aspects of life.”⁷⁶⁰ The consequences of this view are radical. There is no need for a science of politics or economics. Insofar as they aim in principle to uncover the optimal manners of organizing social and economic activity, they are superfluous; any system of political, economic, or social organization not derived from Islamic law is, by its nature, bereft of any value. Nor is there any need for the modern theoretical sciences; they, too, are

⁷⁵⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 15.

⁷⁶⁰ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 15.

superfluous and corrosive, the Qur'an having already "explained to man the secret of his existence and the secret of the universe surrounding him," including "Who brought him from nonexistence into being," the truth about "the nature of the things which he can touch and see" and much else besides.⁷⁶¹ Most radically, perhaps, he delegitimizes virtually all previous "Islamic philosophy and Islamic thought" contending that it, too, amounts to nothing better than "constructs of Jahiliyyah!"⁷⁶²

For leading Salafi thinkers, the legal code does not simply exist to maintain order and ensure individuals are treated equitably in the political community's application of coercive force; the legal code exists to enforce uniformity of thought and behavior according to a strict, God-centered, legal code. There is no place left for privacy or freedom of conscience. Vices that would not amount to a breach of law in any Western society should, on this interpretation, be punishable offenses, where necessary by severe corporal penalties. There is no place for the free pursuit of happiness as personal autonomy, no private sphere protected from interference by the state. These concepts are not just alien to the pattern of life politicized Islam prescribes. They are its vices, only possible where God's commands are ignored. Allawi makes the same point in gentler terms. To "claim the right and the possibility of autonomous action without reference to the source of these in God is an affront, and is discourteous to the terms of the relationship between the human being and God."⁷⁶³ It is to place too much confidence in

⁷⁶¹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 17.

⁷⁶² Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 14.

⁷⁶³ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 11.

one's own intellect, to become too pliant to one's own inclinations; it is to place them above the revealed teachings of God—the ultimate act of pride.

What we call the private sphere is a modern, Western, invention.⁷⁶⁴ It was unknown to the ancients, and the Islamists reject it. Any code of ethics or a morality—standards of good, noble, just, virtuous, worthy human action—that is not justified on the authority of revelation borders on the incomprehensible. What we call freedom, they interpret as slavishness to desire and moral weakness. The propriety of a zone within which the individual is entitled to ‘discover himself,’ or seek to realize his own potential, or as Kant would have it, will for oneself a rationally apprehended law, has nothing to latch onto. As a result, the notion that “justice” (in the highest sense) and “law” should not make identical demands is rejected out of hand: why should something be legal that is not also just or moral? As Schacht explains, “None of the modern systemic distinctions, between private and ‘public’ law, or between civil and penal law, or between subjective and adjective law, exists within the religious law of Islam; there is even no clear separation of worship, ethics, and law proper.”⁷⁶⁵ Where modern liberalism privileges the individual—what required a revolution in moral and intellectual outlook—fundamentalists put forth an inextricably God-centered understanding of the political community. The community

⁷⁶⁴ Following Benjamin Constant, Isaiah Berlin puts it this way: “the modern conception of liberty allows you a right to a certain measure of privacy. Privacy is not a concept frequent in ancient, or indeed medieval thought.” The modern notion, that freedom implies or requires a considerable degree of privacy, goes some considerable distance to quelling the impetus to tyrannize; to acknowledge the legitimacy of a private sphere is to deny the legitimacy of compelling action and thought with that sphere. Berlin adds an observation that encapsulates the point: “Pascal said that all the ills of the world come from the fact men do not sit quietly in a room. Modern liberty confers this right.” Isaiah Berlin and Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991), 42.

⁷⁶⁵ Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 113.

has an infinitely higher dignity than any particular piece of it. As Ali A. Allawi helpfully observes, individualism is so alien to Islamic civilization that no Arabic word quite captures the Western meaning. The term “individual” has little to do with personal autonomy or authenticity derived from a capacity for intelligent self-direction; instead, the Arabic term connotes “singularity, aloofness or solitariness.”⁷⁶⁶

Whereas the permissive laws of liberal democracies aim to prevent one individual from interfering with the rights or property of another, *sharia* attempts to enforce compliance to a singular conception of virtue throughout the entire community. *Sharia*, therefore, regulates minute aspects of conduct down to personal relationships, behavior in the home, intimacy between consenting adults, even the way individuals present themselves in public and what they eat. Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi does a particularly good job of explaining the relationship between morality, law, public esteem, and the penal code on the Salafi understanding. In seeking to “eradicate evils from its social scheme by prohibiting vice, by obviating the causes of its appearance and growth, by closing the inlets through which it creeps into society, and by adopting deterrent measures to check its occurrence,” Mawdudi suggests that *sharia* utterly *depends* on both a closed society and terrifying punishments for those who transgress its customs.⁷⁶⁷

Though he is aware of Westerners’ visceral reaction to “severe and exemplary punishments” such as stoning and dismemberment, he nonetheless explains that they are

⁷⁶⁶ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 11

⁷⁶⁷ Sayyid Abu’l-A’la Mawdudi, “The Islamic Law,” in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman eds. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 93.

an integral part of *sharia*'s legal architecture, even in contemporary times and *especially* in a healthy and well-constituted Islamic state. The natural fear of violence and pain holds the entire system together; the community's moral influences are induced to apply the powerful levers of honor and dishonor in the right way for fear that the failure to do so will result in horrible this-worldly consequences. And the participation of the entire community is important in this respect. Qutb, citing a *hadith*, emphasizes that the entire community of believers is responsible to help enforce proper conduct: "Every individual, again, is charged with the duty of putting an end to any evildoing which he sees."⁷⁶⁸ There is no immunity from the reach of the state's coercive authority, nor even from the judgment of one's fellows. The kind moral indifference to the choices and behavior of others celebrated as tolerance in the West finds no equivalent expression.

Thus one perceives, yet again, why the coercive power of the state—to maim, to disfigure, to stone to death—is inseparable from laws ostensibly sanctioned by God.

Mawdudi explains the interconnectedness of the system this way:

[T]he Sharia is... divided into many parts. Aspects of it do not need any external force for their enforcement; they are and can be enforced only by the ever-awake conscience kindled by his faith in a Muslim. Other parts are enforced by Islam's program of education, training of man's character, and the purification of his heart and his morals. To enforce certain other parts, Islam resorts to the use of the force of public opinion: the general will and pressure of the society. Still other parts have been sanctified by the traditions and the conventions of Muslim society. A very large part of the Islamic system of law, however, needs for its enforcement, in all its details, the coercive power and authority of the state. Political power is essential for protecting the Islamic system of life from deterioration and perversion, for the eradication of vice and the establishment of virtue, and

⁷⁶⁸ Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam*, 87.

for the enforcement of all those laws that require the sanction of the state and the judiciary for their operation.⁷⁶⁹

This helps to explain the Islamist obsession with sexual morality—what amounts to the cloistering of, and often the brutal treatment of, women. While it is their argument that unity of purpose among the community’s entire constellation of moral influences is necessary in order to form “fully Islamic personalities,” nothing is more important than upright models of virtue in the home. Women are a community’s most important teachers; they cannot be permitted to attach value to independence of mind or freedom of any kind. As Qutb explains, “the family system and the relationship between the sexes determine the whole character of a society and whether it is backward or civilized, jahili or Islamic.”⁷⁷⁰ On the (eminently distasteful) Islamist view, sexual desire is so powerful that in whatever proportion a community permits it to influence women’s behavior—if women are allowed, for example, to choose their own sexual partners—in that same proportion, women will cease to fulfill their vital role as instillers of wholesome values.

Qutb contends that

[i]f the family is the basis of the society, and the basis of the family is the division of labor between husband and wife, and the upbringing of children is the most important function of the family, then such a society is indeed civilized. In the Islamic system of life, this kind of a family provides the environment under which human values and morals develop and grow in the new generation; these values and morals cannot exist apart from the family unit. If, on the other hand, free sexual relationships and illegitimate children become the basis of a society, and if the relationship between man and woman is based on lust, passion and impulse, and the division of work is not based on family responsibility and natural gifts; if woman's role is merely to be attractive, sexy and flirtatious, and if woman is freed from her basic responsibility of bringing up children; and if, on her own or under social demand, she prefers to become a hostess or a stewardess in a hotel or

⁷⁶⁹ Sayyid Abu'l-A 'la Mawdudi, “The Islamic Law,” 97.

⁷⁷⁰ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 94.

ship or air company, thus spending her ability for material productivity rather than in the training of human beings, because material production is considered to be more important, more valuable and more honorable than the development of human character, then such a civilization is 'backward' from the human point of view, or 'jahili' in the Islamic terminology.⁷⁷¹

On the Salafi interpretation, then, nothing is as corrosive to a society's morals than the equality of women. To ensure women play their important roles as indoctrinators of future generations, no measure is too extreme. Genital mutilation—designed to make the derivation of pleasure from sexual intercourse impossible—allegedly helps to ensure the integrity of the family unit. Although the practice did not originate with Islam, it is recommended by in a number of *hadiths* and has been welded to Islamic practice in the parts of Africa where Salafi interpretations are widespread (it is less common in the Middle East and has been reported in Indonesia, Turkey, Iran, and even Muslim-majority areas in Western Europe).⁷⁷² The harsh penalties for adultery mandated in Islamic law, the enforcement of female modesty of dress, and the separation of women and men (which amounts to the exclusion of women from wider society) are similarly designed to discourage the kind of sexual dalliance, or discovery of alternative ways of life, that might undermine a woman's commitment to her faith and its continued dissemination. If fundamentalists seem particularly fanatical (and incomprehensible to ordinary Western sensibilities) on the issue of sexual morality, it is because they view the

⁷⁷¹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 94.

⁷⁷² The World Health Organization estimates that 140 million women are living with the consequences of female genital mutilation. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/cn/index.html> A newly elected Salafi member of the Egyptian parliament recently made headlines for calling for its legalization in Egypt. Although the practice has officially banned in 2007 at the insistence of President Mubarak's wife, it has remained a common practice. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/salafi-mp-advocates-female-circumcision-says-suzanne-mubarak-banned-it-news-1>

dissemination of Western ideas concerning the equality of women—and the sexual liberation it portends—as a potentially cataclysmic virus, one capable of wiping out their entire way of life. In fact, it was not until Sayyid Qutb visited the United States and witnessed for himself Americans’ debauchedness that his most radical views began to form.⁷⁷³ His depictions of Western corruption subsequently “became a regular part of the vocabulary and ideology of Islamic fundamentalists.”⁷⁷⁴ He even influenced the Iranian Revolution. Ayatollah’s Khomeini’s image of America as the Great Satan—as a seductive temptress who leads men astray—is derived from Qutb’s denunciations of Western ways, a subject to which we will return in Chapter 9.⁷⁷⁵

No Dethronement of Religion

What virtues are to be publicly commanded and what vices prohibited under threat of violent punishment? The singular conception of virtue to which the state is devoted is allegedly derived from the Qur’an and the Sunna—which is to say, verses and accounts carefully selected by Salafi scholars wedded to the ideas of thinkers like Qutb, and Mawdudi. Thus defined, the *sharia* contains directives on

such varied subjects as religious rituals, personal character, morals, habits, family relationships, social and economic affairs, administration, rights and duties of citizens, judicial system, laws of war and peace, and international

⁷⁷³ Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, 77.

⁷⁷⁴ Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, 81.

⁷⁷⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, 81.

relations. In short, [*sharia*] embraces all the various departments of human life.⁷⁷⁶

In a word, “Islam is a way of life for man prescribed by God.”⁷⁷⁷ Thus, the notion of a separation of church and state borders on nonsensical; it is an alien concept, imported from the West at high cost to Islamic civilization. The state exists for one reason and one alone: to instantiate *sharia*; it is only legitimate to the extent that it does so successfully. With particular emphasis, Al-Banna, Qutb, and Mawdudi insist that the dethronement of religion—so important to modern constitutionalism in the West—cannot even be contemplated in the Islamic world. “Wherever an Islamic community exists... it has a God-given right to step forward and take control of the political authority so that it may establish the Divine system on earth.”⁷⁷⁸

Even before Qutb’s radicalizing influence, the Muslim Brotherhood was emphatically opposed to acknowledging the propriety of any division of authority between church and state. Al-Banna insisted that it is not an open question, that the very concept of Islam encompassed every important aspect of life—religion, politics, economics, morals, society.⁷⁷⁹ In fact, Atatürk’s secularizing reforms, the “‘non-Islamic’ currents in the newly reorganized Egyptian university,” and the “secularist and libertarian” social and literary tendencies he discerned on his arrival in Cairo prompted al-Banna to establish the

⁷⁷⁶ Sayyid Abu’l-A ‘la Mawdudi, “The Islamic Law,” in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman eds. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 94.

⁷⁷⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 67.

⁷⁷⁸ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 69.

⁷⁷⁹ cf. Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 243.

Brotherhood.⁷⁸⁰ He explains in an essay entitled “Toward the Light” that while he understands why “some of the Eastern nations” chose to “deviate from Islam” in imitation of the Christian West, it is neither desirable nor permissible for an Islamic people. For while admiration of the West, and the study of its Renaissance and Enlightenment “made by [the] leaders” of those countries led some to imitate the West’s definitive separation of religion from the day-to-day administration of the state (he surely has Atatürk in mind), al-Banna argues that the very “nature of Islamic doctrines” utterly prohibits a similar course of action in Egypt.⁷⁸¹ Elsewhere, al-Banna explained that

politics is a part of religion, that Islam encompasses the ruler and the ruled. Thus there is not in its teachings a rendering to Caesar that which is Caesar’s and to God that which is God’s. Rather... Caesar and what belongs to Caesar is for God Almighty alone.

Separately, he adds

There is no authority in Islam except the authority of the state which protects the teachings of Islam and guides the nations to the fruits of both religion and the world... Islam does not recognize the conflict which occurred in Europe between the spiritual and temporal [powers]... between the Church and the state.⁷⁸²

Al-Banna refuses to give ground on this question, insisting instead that state support for religion is particularly important in modern times (“Seldom, if ever, has Islam needed the state more than today”). Instead of an acknowledgment that modernity might require the erection of a different kind of state, in which the role of religion might be circumscribed, he insists that as a result of the imperialistic tendencies of European ideas Islam needs the protection and support of political authority more than ever. Absent concrete measures

⁷⁸⁰ Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 4.

⁷⁸¹ Hassan Al-Banna, “Toward the Light” in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman eds. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 71.

⁷⁸² Quoted in Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 244.

to shore up belief—what only the material and coercive resources of the state can achieve—“Islam is threatened with extinction in a world where only the strong can survive.”⁷⁸³

Qutb, too, raises the post-Reformation Christian model explicitly—“a society in which God’s existence is not denied, but his domain is restricted to the heavens and his rule on earth suspended”⁷⁸⁴—and goes on to explain that the Qur’an utterly prohibits any such division of authority. Thus, when asked by Nasser’s police “What are the major divergences between the present regime and the one you aspire to,” Qutb answered that human beings made laws under Nasser’s regime. The separation of church and state was his primary complaint: “the Sharia is not the sole source of all legislation. I would like it to be installed as such. This is the major divergence, all others are derivative.”⁷⁸⁵ Where Christian Reformers had cited the Biblical injunction to “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s,” Qutb cites the following verses from the Qur’an to justify his demand that all earthly authority be reserved for God:

It is He Who is Sovereign in the heavens and Sovereign in the earth (43:84).⁷⁸⁶

The command belongs to God alone. He commands you not to worship anyone except Him. This is the right way of life (12:40).⁷⁸⁷

And yet, this reservation of temporal sovereignty for God, this requirement that He alone command, raises not a small problem where no established priestly class exists. Whose

⁷⁸³ Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 244.

⁷⁸⁴ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*.

⁷⁸⁵ Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 93.

⁷⁸⁶ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 90.

⁷⁸⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 90.

interpretation of holy writ is authoritative? As we will have occasion to note, the ossification and radicalization of Qur'anic interpretation—also, in important part, a consequence of the Salafi movement—has displaced the tradition schools of Islamic law (which at times have proved flexible enough to accommodate changing historical circumstances). Radical Salafi and Wahhabi scholars have, rather successfully, anointed themselves final interpreters of Islamic law, and thus, the effective determiners of what a society governed by Islamic law will look like. In another proof that ideas that are true and/or best for men do not always win out, the Salafi movement's cunning usurpation of this role helps to explain the otherwise inexplicable extent of fundamentalist influence today.

The Illegitimacy of Temporal Legislative Authority

Islamic law construed in this way leaves no space for consultative participatory government. Where everything is already decided by God, the notion that consent and participating individuals can properly *make laws* is alien if not sacrilegious. Where Locke and Spinoza sought to legitimize liberal, tolerant, and participatory government by arguing that New Testament Christianity *demands* a sphere for human law-making, Islamist thinkers have argued, in persuasive terms, that Islam positively forbids it.

It would be difficult to overemphasize the significance of this difference. The notion that the people are sovereign lies at the root of democratic government. To say that the people is sovereign is to say that its rule-making apparatus (the legislative authority) is the

primary political master; the parliament or the congress (with some power reserved to the president or the prime minister) is not subject to the commands of any outside authority. That democratic citizens are simultaneously constituent elements of this highest authority, and subject to the laws they have a hand in determining or otherwise consent to, is a defining feature of constitutional government in the West. This model of citizenship and government is completely impossible, however, where Islamist ideas are strictly adhered to insofar as the people themselves deny that they can constitute the legitimate and sovereign political authority.

The aim behind the prohibition is a noble one. Human wellbeing depends on a good ruler, that is, a ruler who is pious and just on the Salafi understanding.⁷⁸⁸ Only a ruler dedicated to brings about the laws revealed by God can institute just laws. Qutb goes so far as to insist that any political order that is not “based on submission to God alone” cannot ever come close; any such society is de facto a jahili society.⁷⁸⁹ Wherever societies of men claim the authority to live according to laws they themselves establish, a cardinal tenet of Qutb’s Islam – utter submission to what has been revealed – has been violated. “Men cannot change the practice of God in the laws prevailing in the universe” because human beings are, he argues, utterly incapable of making laws worthy of guiding their own lives.⁷⁹⁰ He denies that human beings are free by nature; more important, he denies that men are sufficiently well constituted—morally or intellectually—to make laws that would permit a worthwhile way of living. In short, men are too stupid and too self-

⁷⁸⁸ Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qu’ran*, Vol. 6, 149-150.

⁷⁸⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 77.

⁷⁹⁰ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 40.

interested to legislate well. And since the *sharia* is in principle totalitarian, any law made by human institutions is also an unjust usurpation of divine authority. In Qutb's words,

Man cannot understand all the laws of the universe, nor can he comprehend the unity of this system; he cannot even understand the laws which govern his own person, from which he cannot deviate by a hair's breadth. Thus he is incapable of making laws for a system of life which can be in complete harmony with the universe or which can even harmonize his physical needs with his external behavior. This capability belongs solely to the Creator of the universe and of men..."⁷⁹¹

Nor is this an altogether new idea. As Schacht explains in his classic study of Islamic law, interference with tenets of the *sharia* (even additions to them) by a legislative body (or any non-ecclesiastical body) "presupposes the reception of Western political ideas."⁷⁹² The notion that the people have the right and the legitimate authority to enact laws on the basis of their preferences, needs, or opinions is unthinkable where the extent of God's sovereignty is properly appreciated. Thus, as Schacht elaborates, "a traditional Muslim ruler must, by definition, remain the servant of the sacred law of Islam."⁷⁹³ Positive law must, so far as possible, be derived from (if not identical with) divine law. The reason: what is good in the universe is good *because* it is the word, or rather the will, of God. The people of a state can never be sovereign; they are always, rightfully, and self-consciously, subjects of a higher authority. Bernard Weiss elucidates the most important political consequences of this fact. Muslims are, in effect, the slaves of *Allah*: "The Creator... possesses full property rights over his creatures... God's slaves in fact have no original rights whatsoever, no rights apart from those granted by God, who alone possesses

⁷⁹¹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 85.

⁷⁹² Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law* 101.

⁷⁹³ Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law* 101.

original rights.”⁷⁹⁴ In contrast, “a modern government, and particularly a parliament, with the modern idea of sovereignty behind it, can constitute itself its master” precisely because the people no longer believe legislative authority properly resides with a being of purportedly higher dignity.⁷⁹⁵ As noted in Chapter 6, the new “sacred” opinions carefully put forth by Locke and Rousseau among others include the idea that human beings are endowed with *natural rights*, and that the people constitute the only legitimate sovereign authority. This tenet—central to liberal government—is utterly rejected in Islam, and vehemently so by those who have politicized it.

To wit, even the constitutions America has helped to write in the Islamic world—both Iraq’s and Afghanistan’s—expressly specify that the legitimacy of legislation is contingent on fidelity to Islamic law. In Iraq, legislation is unconstitutional not where it contravenes a right enumerated in a charter of rights and freedoms, but rather, where it contravenes a principle of Islam. The replacement of divine right by natural right in the hearts and minds of men has not even been seriously attempted. Aside from God, only scholars are believed to have any legitimate political authority, and then, it is declarative authority insofar as they are bound to help operationalize the commands of the Qur’an and the *Sunna*, which amount to earthly manifestations of God’s unlimited legislative authority.⁷⁹⁶

That Qutb underlines the more radical implications of this proposition should not come as a surprise. In fact, he derives from it one of his most sophisticated criticisms of liberal democracy. Government according to the principle of consent, far from being a

⁷⁹⁴ Bernard Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law*, 24.

⁷⁹⁵ Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law* 101.

⁷⁹⁶ Bernard Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law*, 114.

precondition for the maintenance of free government, is, in fact, the worst kind of tyranny. For it reduces individuals to serving vain and selfish men who govern not according to what is just and pious, but according to what their base animal appetites demand.⁷⁹⁷ Majoritarian government is no better than servitude to a corrupt master where the people are not upright Muslims living according to Islamic law. Furthermore, even obedience to a government based on the principle of consent is impermissible insofar as submission to a *jahili* society is tantamount to a rejection of God.⁷⁹⁸

Qutb demands the implementation of *sharia* with a view to “actually freeing people from their servitude to other men”⁷⁹⁹; for “in the sight of Islam, the real servitude is following laws devised by someone else.”⁸⁰⁰ Thus, the “abolishing of the dominion of man” and “the abolition of man-made laws” is the first step toward reestablishing upright government, which is equivalent to “the dominion of God on earth.”⁸⁰¹ As we have noted once before, Qutb departs from al-Banna in his insistence that a proselytizing approach is insufficient on its own: the material obstacles in the way of establishing Islamic government can only be removed by force.

In the Arab states where Salafi interpretations have taken hold, notably Saudi Arabia, neither freedom of worship, nor anything resembling the Western separation between church and state can exist. Houses for the worship of religions other than Islam are expressly forbidden. In fact, the Saudi Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the

⁷⁹⁷ cf., Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 118.

⁷⁹⁸ Luke Loboda, “The Thought of Sayyid Qutb,” 7.

⁷⁹⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 52.

⁸⁰⁰ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 53.

⁸⁰¹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 52.

Prevention of Vice forbids all non-Islamic religious practice. Planes flying into Saudi Arabia are swept not only for bombs, but for Bibles. Only Muslims can become citizens of the Kingdom. The religious establishment or state sponsored *ulema*, funded generously by the regime, exerts a deep influence over the way the royal family governs the state; no law can be enacted that it does not first approve.

Faith as Submission

At the personal level, submission to revealed commands is absolute. In fact, this is the first substantive teaching of the Qur'an. Following only the opening prayer to Allah ("In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the entire universe...") is the verse "you alone do we worship." As Mawdudi explains in his influential commentary,

the term [for worship] *'ibadah* is used in three senses: (i) worship and adoration; (ii) obedience and submission; and (iii) service and subjection. In this particular context the term carries all these meanings simultaneously.⁸⁰²

His commentary on the verse ends with the observation "none but [God] may be the subject of man's worship and total devotion, of man's unreserved obedience, or man's absolute subjection and servitude." In this light, it is not hard to appreciate that Islam *literally* means submission to the will of Allah.

⁸⁰² Sayyid Abu'l-A 'la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 37.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's biography demonstrates the pervasive emphasis on abdication of free intellect and will in a particularly powerful way. Ali is today an outspoken critic of the treatment of women in the Islamic world; in fact, she wrote the film—*Submission*—for which Theo van Gogh, its producer, was assassinated on an Amsterdam street. Born in Somalia, she found her way to the West almost accidentally after having being swept up for a time by “the new wave of Brotherhood Islam.”⁸⁰³ In her memoirs and in her interviews, she emphasizes time and time again that this assertive strain of Islam is “a doctrine that requires from the individual to become a slave,” one that “limits the imagination to what you can find in the Qur'an.”⁸⁰⁴ Growing up in Somalia, she recalls that the Brotherhood was “cool,” even that her generation “wanted religion... They wanted Islamic law.”⁸⁰⁵ Arab oil money flowed in to palpable effect. Groups of young people, Ali among them, “thrilled to new movements” and established “small groups of true believers, as we felt ourselves to be.” They read al-Banna and Qutb in particular. As Ali recalls,

[t]he Islam that we were imbibing stemmed from the hard, essentialist beliefs of thinkers seeking to revive the original Islam of the Prophet Muhammad and His disciples in the seventh century. The intention was to live according to the ancient ways in every detail of our lives... Everyone was convinced that there was an evil worldwide crusade aimed at eradicating Islam, directed by the Jews and by the whole Godless West. We needed to defend Islam. We wanted to be involved in the *jihad*...⁸⁰⁶

In the end, the glimpse at Western ways Jane Austen's novels provided—especially the strange notion that women are equal to men—broke the monopoly politicized Islam held

⁸⁰³ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 127.

⁸⁰⁴ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 127, 132.

⁸⁰⁵ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 126.

⁸⁰⁶ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 108-109.

over her own mind, ultimately to inspire in her enough unease and doubt to seek asylum in the Netherlands. She roused the courage to get off the plane in Amsterdam on the way to meet, for the first time, the Canadian man she had been given to. Needless to say, she did not look back. Ali's accounts help Western readers to understand the reality of Qutb's assertions, in particular, the emphasis on utter submission so central to "the new wave of Brotherhood Islam." In Somalia, Ali too seems to have believed that "no individual or group of individuals can be truly Muslim until they wholly submit to God alone in the manner taught by the Messenger of God."⁸⁰⁷ Qutb goes so far as to assert that searching for reasons to believe sullies the believer's faith. One does not submit to Islam's commands because, on reflection, one determines them to represent the best way of life; belief or "love of the Divine Law" has to come "without any question" and as a "consequence of pure submission to God and of freedom from servitude to anyone else."⁸⁰⁸ It is worth underlining that the act of giving oneself over without question or reservation or limit is an essential, perhaps *the* essential, element of faith on Qutb's understanding.

The basis of the message is that one should accept the Sharia without any question and reject all other laws in any shape or form. This is Islam. There is no other meaning of Islam. One who is attracted to this basic Islam has already resolved this problem; he will not require any persuasion through showing its beauty and superiority. This is one of the realities of the faith.⁸⁰⁹

Roger Scruton points out that to observers Islam indeed seems to be defined as much by "constant rehearsals of the believer's submission to God" as by its guiding tenets. The

⁸⁰⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 85.

⁸⁰⁸ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 30.

⁸⁰⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 18.

repetition of sacred words, the regular and precise performance of commanded gestures, the obligatory prayers five times daily, the annual fast, the observance of strict dietary laws, the pilgrimage to Mecca—all are important not so much for their content or what they represent, but insofar as they constitute a believer’s total submission to commands without question or reservation.

As a corollary, according to literalists, both the Sufi manner of practicing Islam and liberal-minded *ijtihad*—the application of reason on the text, for the sake of accommodating Islam to the modern world or working out apparent inconsistencies—are expressly forbidden. Where the Enlightenment and Reformation proceeded first to free men’s minds (what was believed to be a precondition of free government), Salafi doctrine teaches that men’s minds are rightfully bound, that genuine piety requires complete abdication of intellect to the will of God (and in women’s case, their husbands and fathers too).

Precisely as a result of the centrality of submission, Islam cannot be construed as a private, personal, relationship with God. According to its radical interpreters, as well as many moderates, the individualized spirituality familiar to worshippers in the West today (Christian and otherwise) is anathema to Islam. To separate worship from strict adherence to an established moral code, publicly enforced by the community’s honors and dishonors if not its laws and penalties, erodes its foundation. “[*B*]ecause of its very nature,” Qutb explains that Islam “abhors being reduced to pure thought”;⁸¹⁰ “it cannot

⁸¹⁰ My Emphasis. Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 34.

come into existence simply as a creed in the hearts of individual Muslims”;⁸¹¹ as Qutb emphasizes over and over, “Islam cannot fulfill its role except by taking concrete form in society.”⁸¹²

Where outward demonstrations of belief (and submission) are believed to be inseparable from a religion’s personal spiritual elements, the separation of religious observance from politics and the state’s laws can never be considered legitimate. And where worship is not believed to be, in principle, a private matter, but rather an integral component of membership in a wider community (one that extends, moreover, well beyond the borders of any single state) tolerance of those who do not worship in the same way becomes problematic at best. Those who do not participate in the public aspects of the religion will never be considered full members of the community by those who do. It bears repeating that the separation of church and state and all that springs from it—religious tolerance, the liberation of the human intellect, the free pursuit of happiness—requires a prior, and much more fundamental, separation in a “society’s habits of mind.” Qutb devotes tremendous energy to shoring up the very opinions that would make it impossible to sunder “the connection between political form and divine revelation”⁸¹³ in the Islamic world, always taking care to root his arguments in holy text.

It is for this reason that radical Salafis contend that the Sufi orders, championing an “inner-worldly variant of Islam than stresses emotive and personal experiences of the divine,” amount to a corrupted, even a deviant, form of Islam. One Saudi-based

⁸¹¹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 42.

⁸¹² Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 3.

⁸¹³ Mark Lilla, “Coping with Political Theology,” cf. Chapter 5 above.

foundation, *al-Haramain*, goes so far as to indict Sufi orders for spreading opinions that undergird liberal democracy, including the notion “that all religions are valid” as well as other “pacifist views.” Sufi Muslims, according to *al-Haramain*’s website, are insufficiently intolerant; they teach “that work and family is the greatest Jihad, rather than establishing Allah’s religion on Earth through the use of the sword.”⁸¹⁴ It is not hard to appreciate why tolerance for religious minorities where Salafi opinions prevail is bound to be fragile if it exists at all.

The submission demanded by Islam, in the ideal case, is willing. Willing submission—to God, or to those whom the community of believers confer divine authority—is especially important in Islam because God is the source of all valuable (as in inherently worthy, dignified, or redeeming) human action. Submission to what is noble is therefore noble. Pushed to the extreme, however, nothing else can be. To internalize any other moral code is to separate oneself from the community’s decent and upright citizens. According to Ali Allawi, the very core of Islamic civilization is its complete devotion to—i.e., the community’s internalization of, and society’s organization around—tenets revealed by Islam’s prophets.

At [Islam’s] heart was an act of willing submission—the literal meaning of ‘Islam’—to the divine reality from which all manifestations of its civilization ultimately derived. This ideal has remained intact ever since the inception of the religion, and in the final analysis it has been the bulwark which has so far stood against the dissolution of Islam into modernity.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹⁴ RAND, *The Muslim World After 9/11*, 22.

⁸¹⁵ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, xiv.

Allawi emphasizes *willing* submission. So, in fact, to Qutb and Mawdudi. And insofar as true faith cannot issue from compulsion of conscience, submission to divine command is *ipso facto* free and willing. But because worship cannot be private on this interpretation, submission to Islamic law can easily become much more severe in practice whether or not the mind gives free consent. The problem is that where complete submission to God is not freely given, those claiming religious authority on earth have shown themselves more than willing to compel its outward appearance, brutally where necessary. It is not a coincidence that where the most radical Salafi elements have achieved political authority—Afghanistan under the Taliban, Iraq’s Al-Anbar province at the height of the insurgency, and Saudi Arabia—one also witnesses the most brutal and widespread atrocities committed in the name of religion today. If the conscience cannot be compelled, obedience to a public moral code certainly can.

Add to this the monopoly over educational and cultural influences the Muslim Brotherhood seeks to establish as part of their proselytizing project. And suddenly the line between freely choosing Islam and indoctrination begins to blur. Recall Mawdudi’s insistence that in order to built fully Islamic personalities, the entire schema of the community’s moral, intellectual, and cultural influences—from its schools, to its religion, to its customs, to its honors and dishonors, to its music, to its art, to the laws and the penal code—must pull in the same direction. Recall in this connection Qutb’s insistence that the first requirement of a pure faith “is that God’s sovereignty alone extend over hearts and consciences in human relationships and morals, in lives and possessions, in modes and manners,” or as he later puts it, that “belief ought to be imprinted on hearts and rule

over consciences” so thoroughly, in fact, that “it seeps into the depths of the human soul.”⁸¹⁶ If willing, unreflective, submission constitutes the very heart of Islam, and if the modern West—our science and industry as much as constitutional democracy—is built on the proud, self-confident, emancipation of the human mind and will, an important tension between Islam thus understood and a guiding precept of the modern West is revealed.

Perhaps sensing that complete intellectual submission of mind constitutes the lynchpin of their program, conservative religious authorities in the Islamic world have preemptively forbidden any accommodation of *sharia* to the conclusions of human reason freely exercised. The Saudi Arabian Directorate of *Ifṭāʾ*, (Preaching and Guidance) has issued the directive condemning as *kāfir*, or unbeliever, anyone who “believes that there is a guidance (*huda*) more perfect than that of the Prophet.”⁸¹⁷ It has gone so far as to elucidate a list of opinions that are to “be regarded as a serious departure from the precepts of Islam, punishable according to Islamic law.” The problem: the opinions prohibited by the religious authorities are among those that are essential for the establishment of a liberal democracy. As Fauzi M. Najjar conveniently summarizes, proscribed beliefs include:

- (1) institutions and laws enacted by human beings are superior to the Sharia;
- (2) Islam has been the cause to the backwardness of Muslims;
- (3) Islam is not applicable in the 20th Century;
- (4) Islam is limited to one’s relation with God, and has nothing to do with the daily affairs of life

⁸¹⁶ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 25-26; cf., 29.

⁸¹⁷ Fauzi M. Najjar, “The Debate on Islam and Secularism in Egypt,” <http://www.spittoon.org/archives/5906>.

- (5) the application of the *hudud* (legal punishments decreed by God) is incongruous with the modern age; and
- (6) it is permissible not to rule according to what God revealed.⁸¹⁸

In the same vein, Muhammad al-Ghazali, a leading Egyptian theologian, has stressed the impropriety of anything resembling the establishment of a private moral sphere durably protected from state interference. Again, to entertain such notions makes one a disbeliever, what for someone born a Muslim is equivalent to apostasy. The cleric is unambiguous: “As separation of religion and state, secularism is unadulterated *kufi*.”⁸¹⁹

Inerrancy

Unfortunately, the illiberal aspects of literalist interpretations of Islamic law gaining resonance today cannot easily be combated by liberal and modernizing interpretations. The second line of Qur’an’s second *surah*—what amounts to the book’s second concrete teaching (the first was about submission)—announces that nothing in the text is to be questioned: “This is the Book of Allah, there is no doubt in it.” In addition to proving that the Qur’an is undoubtedly the word of God, the verse is taken to prove “there is no room for doubt about its contents.”⁸²⁰ This proposition is widely held; even Ali A. Allawi, a very moderate interpreter, avers that the very “bedrock of any Islamic sensibility must be the textual certainty of the Quran as the unaltered and unalterable word of God.”⁸²¹ This, the invincible commitment to, and faith in, the inerrancy of Islam’s sacred texts, is

⁸¹⁸ Fauzi M. Najjar, “The Debate on Islam and Secularism in Egypt.”

⁸¹⁹ Fauzi M. Najjar, “The Debate on Islam and Secularism in Egypt.”

⁸²⁰ Sayyid Abu’l-A ‘la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Qur’an*, 45.

⁸²¹ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 12.

one of the most powerful impediments, if not *the* most powerful impediment, to Islam's transformation on anything resembling the Enlightenment/Reformation model. As a result of this verse, any attempt to reinterpret the Qur'an that can be portrayed as straying even a little distance from the words on the page literally construed are easily painted as transgressions against God and thereby discredited.

Recall that Spinoza inaugurated critical interpretation of the Bible by professing to demonstrate that the Apostles were so ordinary (and so creative) that their accounts of the revelations they received cannot be trusted (human beings, he went on to show, have equivalent access to God's laws directly by their reason). They even suggested that Biblical accounts and commands were best understood as allegorical moral tales counseling neighborliness above all. This assertion that the Qur'an is infallible stands as but one of the barriers in the way of any such critical interpretation of Islam's laws. For rooting their objections to reformist and modernizing theorists so powerfully in holy writ, Salafi thinkers are able to marshal tremendous authority in service to their view. As Qutb insists, the Qur'an is not to be considered a "book of stories or history," which was precisely what Spinoza professed to demonstrate in his *Treatise*; the Qur'an is to be interpreted as prescribing "a way of life."⁸²² Elsewhere, Qutb calls efforts to "supply a modernized version of Islamic jurisprudence" a "vulgar joke on Islam."⁸²³ Muslims are duty-bound to "reject this ridiculous proposal," for it would effectively plunge Islamic civilization further into ignorance when what is necessary is a literalist revival.

⁸²² Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 12.

⁸²³ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 37.

Intellectual Suicide and the Closing of the Gates of Ijtihad

The difficulty, of course, is determining what precisely a literalist interpretation of Islamic law requires. Who is the final arbiter where learned scholars disagree? Modernist reformers no less than *jihadists* can cite Qur’anic verses to buttress their calls for political reform. What determines which interpretations get traction? Traditionally, Islamic law is based on four principles or roots (*usul*): the Qur’an, the *sunna* of the prophet, the consensus of the scholars on the meaning of the Qur’an and the *sunna* (*ijma*), and the application of reason to these latter sources (*kīyas*).⁸²⁴ *Kīya* means analogy, and *ijtihād* is the term for the application of an individual’s reason to draw conclusions by analogies to three prior sources. This was, from the beginning, the most controversial of the *usul*. Some schools of Islamic law, notably the Shafi’i and the Hanbali schools, originally subordinated it to the first two principles. While reasoning by analogy was, in the final analysis, formally acknowledged as one of the four *usul*, a consensus emerged about 900 A.D. that the gates of *ijtihād* had closed. Scholars from all four major schools of Islamic law “felt that all essential questions had been thoroughly discussed and finally settled,” in effect, that the application of human reason to questions of law was no longer necessary or proper.⁸²⁵ The scholars would be, henceforth, confined to the explaining, applying, and at most interpreting the doctrine thitherto laid down and established. As Schacht explains,

⁸²⁴ Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law* 60.

⁸²⁵ Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law* 70.

This ‘closing of the door *ijtihād*,’ as it was called, amounted to the demand for *taklīd*, a term which had originally denoted the kind of reference to Companions of the Prophet than had been customary in the ancient schools of law, and which now came to mean the unquestioning acceptance of the doctrines of established schools and authorities.⁸²⁶

In other words, Islam’s eminent scholars and theologians were, henceforth, to be bound to earlier legal interpretations and determinations. By way of analogy, imagine that the judges who make up the U.S. Supreme Court believed themselves bound to the precedents and legal reasoning of their predecessors. Now imagine that the gates of *ijtihād* closed on the Court in the era of *Plessey*, or worse yet, *Dred Scott*. The American regime would look very different today.

Something analogous has happened in the Islamic world. Modernist reinterpretation is forbidden. And the Salafi/Wahabbi strains of Islam gaining adherents and influence today follow Ibn Taymiyya in their rejection of each of the four traditional schools of Islamic law, schools of interpretation that were “inherently moderate, restrained and subtle in their decisions, and allowed for considerable flexibility and leeway in their implementation.”⁸²⁷ Put another way, they adopted the position that the gates of *ijtihād* are closed, but they have nonetheless rejected much of the more flexible and moderate legal reasoning that ought to have survived to guide the interpretation and application of Islamic law.

At this point, something more must be said about Ibn Taymiyya whose authority Salafi scholars invoke in support of their rigid fundamentalist interpretations. He was a

⁸²⁶ Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law* 71.

⁸²⁷ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 118.

traditionalist from the Hanbali school, but he rejected what he believed was an overreliance on the consensus of the scholars (*ijma*), a position that put him in considerable tension with the prevailing orthodoxy. He taught that liberal interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sunna had permitted the corruption of Islam. The religious establishment, moreover—he is said to have complained of “rationalistic theologians, lax judges, Sufis, and dervishes”—was complicit. Required above all, on his analysis, was “a return to the pristine purity of the first four decades of Islam.”⁸²⁸ To achieve this, he held that the only interpretative consensus that mattered was the consensus reached by the prophet and his own companions. Of course, this amounted to a rejection of the established role of the scholars and left only a very narrow space for the operation of reason.

If Taymiyya was, in effect, applying his own judgment to the principles of Islamic law—though only to reject the consensus of the scholars as it had emerged, and thus, the new *taklid* as well, all on the basis of a more literal reading of the Qur'an and the *sunna*—he “did not explicitly advocate the reopening of the ‘door of *ijtihad*,’” or at least, he supported opening it no further than his own immediate purposes required. In fact, he offered a justification that is not outlandish on its face, teaching, as Schacht explains, that it is “unauthorized and dangerous to follow blindly the authority of any man, excepting only the Prophet, in matters of religion and religious law.”⁸²⁹ In other words, Ibn Taymiyya reasoned his way to a rejection of the scholarly consensus, a rejection of the community's

⁸²⁸ Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 95.

⁸²⁹ Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law*, 72.

application of reason to matters of law and its application, in favor of a more thoroughgoing submission to the first two principles of Islamic law interpreted as literally as possible—the Qur'an itself, and the *sunna*. In this connection, Goldziher makes a very important point in his seminal study. At the turn of the twentieth century, the important contemporary Islamic jurists and theologians, while in agreement on the dignity of revealed text (it is the ultimate source of truth), nonetheless left open an important place for reason:

Not long ago, the recently deceased Egyptian mufti Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) could still... declare it as a *principle of Islam* that 'when reason and tradition are in contradiction, the right of decision rests with reason.' 'This is a principle,' he says, 'which very few people oppose, and only people who are of no account.'⁸³⁰

He goes on to acknowledge that this ascription of considerable dignity to the human intellect, which ultimately dates back to the Mu'tazila tradition and their enthusiastic reception and incorporation of Greek philosophy,⁸³¹ was anathema to traditionalists: "it was unavoidable that their assertion of the preeminence of reason over tradition [the *sunna*] in theological proof should be an abomination in the eyes of the intransigent old school."⁸³² Citing Taymiyya, Goldziher explains that the traditionalists rejected reason *tout court* because those who reasoned their way to a divine truth would nonetheless fail to achieve the divine reward (which comes not from rational investigation but from faithful submission), and because reliance on reason can "easily lead to error, and so to

⁸³⁰ My Emphasis. Quoted in Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 110.

⁸³¹ Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 85-6, 103.

⁸³² Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 110.

unbelief.”⁸³³ As Goldziher sums up, reason—whether it is being used to seek after eternal moral and political truths, or as an instrument to shed light upon scripture or resolve the apparent paradoxes it contains—must therefore be forbidden. And since “reason is not required for the grasping of religious truth,” it follows that “belief is bound to the letter of the received texts, solely and exclusively.”⁸³⁴

This somewhat heterodox view quickly came to dominate the Hanbali school. Perhaps as a consequence, the Hanbali school was on the verge of extinction, and Taymiyya (who radicalized it) forgotten, by the eighteenth century, as we have seen. It was around this time that Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, in cooperation with the House of Saud on the Arabia peninsula, set a revival in motion the consequences of which ultimately led to problems now associated with politicized and *jihadist* Islam.⁸³⁵ The overwhelming emphasis Qutb and Mawdudi place on literal interpretation of the Qur’an and the ways of the prophet as reported by those who knew Him, as well as their rejection of virtually all previous Islamic philosophy and Qur’anic commentary, is a product of their rehabilitation of Taymiyya’s approach.

Today, Salafi councils, clerics, and theologians, seizing upon the verses of the Qur’an and the *sunnas* that suit their political purposes, put forth arguments such as Qutb’s claiming for themselves almost unquestionable authority. To make matters worse, in large thanks

⁸³³ Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 111.

⁸³⁴ Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 111.

⁸³⁵ By the 1960s it was possible to say that the “great majority” of those who subscribed to the Hanbali school were Wahhabis, their numbers, no longer inconsiderable or waning (Schacht, 66). In the half-century since, their influence has exploded. In Saudi Arabia, moreover, Wahhabis found a political regime willing to govern the state more or less according to their legal theories (Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law*, 87).

to Saudi support and their capture of institutions of higher education and theology throughout the Arab world, the Wahabbi/Salafi school has exploded in size and influence, gaining so many adherents that it now claims the effective “right” not only to say what Islamic law is, but also, “to determine who [is] within the faith.”⁸³⁶ This is the “crisis of Islam” Allawi and others have identified. A domineering “church-like” religious order, claiming ultimate authority over the universe of Sunni believers, is increasingly becoming the center of intellectual and theological gravity in the Arab-Islamic world. (The reasons for its resonance are discussed in the subsequent chapter.)

While Robert Reilly acknowledges the pernicious and radicalizing impact of Salafi thinkers,⁸³⁷ as well as the decisive impact of Ibn Taymiyya,⁸³⁸ he traces the closing of the Muslim mind to an epistemological debate that ended around 1195, less than a century before Taymiyya’s time.⁸³⁹ At issue was the relationship between reason and revelation. Confidence in the authority of the human intellect—in particular, man’s ability to know the world by his own lights—rested uneasily against Qur’anic descriptions of an all-powerful, willful, God. Where the Gospels had been taken to imply an identity of reason, God’s understanding, and a knowable nature order by men like Spinoza, the Qur’an was invoked to deny the authority of reason insofar as the positing of a knowable world governed by permanent natural laws makes the simultaneous existence of a willful and omnipotent God nonsensical.

⁸³⁶ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 120.

⁸³⁷ Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 173-204.

⁸³⁸ “Ibn Taymiyya did to theology what al-Ghazali did to philosophy; he exiled it” (Reilly, 123).

⁸³⁹ 1195 is the year Averroes books were burned and the teaching of philosophy was banned in Cordoba. (Reilly, 121).

It was not always this way. The Islamic world's discovery of Hellenic thought "opened the Muslim mind in a way it had never before been in the spirit of free inquiry and speculative thought."⁸⁴⁰ Avicenna and Averroes represent the peak of Islamic philosophy and are generally considered to rank among the greatest philosophers simply. Averroes taught that reason and revelation are not only compatible; more than this, the Prophet himself compels men to reason. Averroes concludes from this that reason cannot lead to conclusions that contradict what has been revealed. Commenting on a verse from the Qur'an—"Summon to the way of your Lord by wisdom and by good preaching, and debate with them in the most effective manner" (XVI, 125)—he puts it this way:

Now since this Law is true and summons to the study that leads to knowledge of the truth, we the Muslim community know definitely that demonstrative study does not lead to [conclusions] conflicting with what is given in the Law; for truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it.⁸⁴¹

Al-Ghazali's assault on philosophy and reason in the name of faith (understood in terms of submission of mind to Allah's will as revealed by the Prophet) was, nonetheless, successful. The impact of epistemic closure seeped from philosophy to law to literature: a kind of ubiquitous and thoroughgoing traditionalism, utterly incapable of justifying its own practices, emerged as a result. What can only be described as the ossification an entire civilization's intellectual life is, for Reilly, the root cause of the region's many

⁸⁴⁰ Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 14.

⁸⁴¹ Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise, Determining what the Connection is Between Religion and Philosophy*. In Medieval Political Philosophy, Charles Butterworth Trans. (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2008), 169.

political, social, and economic problems today.⁸⁴² Put another way, the crisis of Islamic civilization—manifest in everything from suicide bombings committed in the name of Islam, to the ubiquity of autocratic government in the Middle East, to the region’s seemingly incorrigible economic stagnation, to the paucity of Nobel Prize winners and literary geniuses of Arab descent—is traceable to this “intellectual suicide” committed in the name of faith more than a millennium ago.⁸⁴³

Refusing to recognize this, Salafi thinkers reject outright any reincorporation of Western philosophy into Islamic civilization. Qutb turns Reilly’s argument on its face, contending that the intermingling of Greek philosophy and Christian theology with early commentaries on the Qur’an is responsible for corrupting Islamic jurisprudence and its guiding principles.⁸⁴⁴ Athens and Jerusalem are responsible for Islam’s corruption. Qutb, for this part, understands that the West was built by its philosophic and religious traditions. He is adamant, for precisely this reason, that it has no place—or almost no place—in a properly ordered society. The only exception he allows is students steeped in “pure Islamic thought” (which he distinguishes from “Islamic philosophy,” presumably

⁸⁴² Al-Allawi cogently explicates its consequence: “The exchange... was ‘settled’, at least in the Sunni Islamic world, in favor of Ghazzali. This fact was presumed to have sealed the fate of philosophic inquiry in Sunni Islam until the modern era. Islam became immune to rationalist discourse—or so the claim ran” (Ali A. Allawi, *Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 104). “Or so the claim ran” would seem to indicate that Allawi doubts the validity of this common line of argument. In fact, he agrees with this characterization of the dispute between Averroes and Al-Ghazali and the consequences in terms of epistemology. He disagrees, however, with Islamic liberals and American “neo-conservatives” who claim Al-Ghazali’s “hold on subsequent Muslim life” accounts for its failure “to produce modernity on its own” (104-105). This is also one of the most important disagreements between Reilly and Allawi.

⁸⁴³ Robert Reilly, *Closing of the Muslim Mind*. Reilly notes that it remains unclear when Greek philosophy first reached the Islamic world. He has dated the beginning of its influence to the late eighth or early ninth century.

⁸⁴⁴ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 11.

on the basis the vast majority of Islamic philosophy is both cause and consequence of *jahilliya*). His intention seems to be to help prepare a generation of thinkers like him.

Qutb read the Greeks and rejected them. Advanced students of “pure Islamic thought,” will, similarly, be inoculated against being “too much influenced” and will therefore read Western philosophy “critically,” “prepared to reject all that does not agree with the fundamental modes of thought of a Muslim people.”⁸⁴⁵

No reader of Plato’s *Republic* can fail to be struck that Qutb’s metaphor for Islam is a great tree that blocks out the sun.⁸⁴⁶ Islam provides guidance for life, as we have seen, but also “gives information about the Unseen as well as about the visible world.” In order to be sufficiently “tall, strong, [and] wide-spreading... clearly its roots must go down deep and be in proportion to its size.”⁸⁴⁷ This is the perfect metaphor for politicized Islam: its originators radicalized religious practice in such a way that as communities devoted to these ideas spread and grew, they increasingly shielded those same communities from exposure to alternative ways of living that might break Islamists’ monopoly over the community’s formative influences.

Islamic Law as a Limit on Executive Authority?

As for that other pillar of constitutional democracy—the rule of law (and citizens’ equality before the laws)—some, notably Noah Feldman, have argued that secular Arab

⁸⁴⁵ Sayid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam*, 291.

⁸⁴⁶ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 26

⁸⁴⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 26.

dictatorships restore limited government according to law by instituting *sharia* as *limiting principle*. Feldman points to the Ottoman Empire before efforts to reform its legal code to demonstrate that a *ulema* deriving its authority from its guardianship of sacred religious tenets can effectively limit government.⁸⁴⁸ This was indeed the dynamic in the Ottoman Empire prior to the Tanzimat reforms of the nineteenth century. The scholars and Caliph, whose legal judgments exerted a concrete check on the exercise of executive power in practice, effectively limited the Sultan's power. Bernard Lewis noted the same dynamic in *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*.⁸⁴⁹ Where Feldman goes further than Lewis is in suggesting that the relationship might be reestablished today.

What Feldman fails to appreciate is that a government limited in this way, according to laws interpreted by an authority independent of the executive, is only durable where the division of authority between the interpreters of the law and its executors is strong: the independence of each authority guaranteed by the widespread perception of its legitimacy, and animated by an ambition to see its role enacted. Unfortunately, the division of authority necessary to translate limiting rules on parchment into effective limitations of state authority has not been, and is unlikely to be, duplicated where the politicized Islam of Qutb and his acolytes has gained influence. The propriety of any such division is rejected out of hand. Fundamentalists seek to utilize the moral authority of Islam to *gain and maintain* political authority. In the two countries where committees of scholars play the largest political role, moreover—Iran and Saudi Arabia—their influence

⁸⁴⁸ Noah Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁸⁴⁹ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

is decidedly illiberal; they more often stand in the way of liberalizing measures, and rarely if ever restrain the government's authority in the name of Islam. Often, they demand the enforcement of a puritanical moral code.

To put this in the terms of Islamic law, influential scholars have not always demanded the intersection of religion and politics on religious grounds in the same way fundamentalists do today. Nor have they always insisted on so thoroughgoing an application of *sharia*.

For most of Islam's history, calls for the unification of the coercive power of the state with the religious authority had little effect.⁸⁵⁰ In most places, and for the better part of Islamic history, a bargain was struck between the guardians of Islamic law (who recognized its totalitarian claims in theory), and the rulers governing increasingly large and complex Muslim states (who recognized the practical impossibility of deriving an entire legal code from the Qur'an). As Joseph Schacht explains in his classic exposition,

[A] balance established itself in most Islamic countries between legal theory and legal practice; an uneasy truce between the '*ulama*' ('scholars'), the specialists in religious law, and the political authorities came into being. The '*ulama*' themselves were conscious of this; they expressed their conviction of the ever-increasing corruption of contemporary conditions (*fasad al-zaman*), and, in the absence of a dispensing authority, formulated the doctrine that necessity (*darura*) dispensed Muslims from observing strict rules of the Law. Whereas traditional Islamic governments were unable to change it by legislation, the scholars half sanctioned the regulations which the rulers in fact enacted, by insisting on the duty, already emphasized in the Qur'an (sura iv. 59, 83, and elsewhere), of obedience to the established authorities. As long as the sacred Law received formal recognition as a religious ideal, it did not insist on being fully applied in practice.⁸⁵¹

As we have seen, Salafi thinkers sought to delegitimize every aspect of this compromise.

It is a testament to their success, moreover, that there is insufficient appetite to see the link

⁸⁵⁰ Bernard Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law*, 15-16.

⁸⁵¹ Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law*, 84.

between enforcer of law and interpreter of law sundered. Iran's Council of Guardians determines who can run for office, and exerts a heavy influence on whoever occupies the country's highest offices. The Islamic scholars who, not long ago, constituted Yasser Arafat's domestic opposition, today (thanks to elections) rule Gaza and have gone not a short way toward enforcing *sharia* under the banner of Hamas. So, too, Al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Taliban claimed the right to rule on religious grounds and erected some of the most totalitarian states the likes of which have not been seen outside of the twentieth century. Rather than vesting a potentially limiting prerogative of review in a powerful and independent body, those claiming the authority of politicized Islam have sought to marshal religion's authority over men's hearts and minds in order to monopolize coercive force. The story always ends the same way: government becomes despotic, dysfunctional, and inhuman; and religion is corrupted by the abusive use vain claimants to ecclesiastical authority make of it.

CHAPTER VIII

WHY THE RESURGENCE TOOK HOLD

Ideas are important. But ideas alone do not a revolution in social consciousness make, not even when they have taken over academia and are supported by the limitless resources of wealthy patrons. Ideas persuade widely when events give them footholds in men's lives and minds. Just as the European wars of religion left terrorized Europeans longing for a depoliticized Christianity, and just as Enlightenment notions concerning political equality resonated against the rampant social injustice of the old regime in France, so the political and social environment in the Middle East today has created an environment in which the ideas put forth by Salafi thinkers have a natural widespread appeal.

For new ideas cannot gain traction without upending the status quo, without the prior discrediting of the dominant opinions they would replace. Fouad Ajami's beautiful intellectual history, *The Arab Predicament*, helps to demonstrate why politicized Islam has become more and more popular as the decades since WWI have elapsed. He highlights the most important arguments advanced by proponents of the ideologies and political movements that have battled to shape the politics of the Middle East over the course of the twentieth century, and in so doing, helps to illustrate the Arab world's mighty struggle, ultimately a dismal failure, to come to terms with the modernity. The most radical proposals never quite stuck. In every case, the failure of meaningful reform, and

the wars, revolutions, and political dysfunction that ensued, have instead solidified the place of radical manners of interpreting Islamic law.

Attempts to modernize the Middle East in the twentieth century can be organized into five distinguishable groups, virtually every one driven by elites intent on a top-down approach to reform: the liberal nationalist post-WWI model inspired by Europe's nation-state system and presided over by the imperial powers; Nasser's assertive Arab nationalism in Egypt; the socialist-communist popular-welfare program that initially inspired the Ba'ath movements in Iraq and Syria; the oil-financed contract model—an uneasy hybrid of secularized jet-setting elites and a people deeply impacted by Wahhabi ideas—epitomized by Saudi Arabia since the 1980s; and, most recently, the American-led attempt to promote liberal democracy in Iraq. The promise of each burned out in spectacular fashion, however, because reformers effectively tried to push the state beyond its society. The failures were revealed in spectacular fashion: the first withering as a result of Israel's creation and the loss of the Palestine in 1948; the second as a result of Egypt's crushing defeat in 1967, and subsequently, its willingness to pursue a separate peace with a Jewish state; the third, as a result of dismal failures of the Ba'ath regimes to live up the promises their socialist founders made to justify revolution, and, of course, the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, triumphantly repelled by Islamists hailing from across the region; and the fourth, because it has become impossible to brazenly finance and promote radical Islam and remain on reasonable terms with the United States in a post-9/11 world.

In every case, the outer trappings of modernity have been embraced. States in the Middle East participate in the global economy, employ Western technologies, organize the administrative apparatus of the state along ostensibly Western lines, and in some cases, have even established ostensibly democratic institutions. But the ideas that underpin these features of life in the West were never completely internalized, at least not in any major Muslim-majority country other than Turkey. This created a vacuum for Islamist sentiment. In each case, it grew.

The Arab world's would-be revolutionaries failed to appreciate what a few of its luminaries did: political reform unaccompanied by cultural reform is doomed to failure. Ajami invokes Ali Ahmad Said, a Syrian poet and public intellectual, to make the point as plainly as possible:

We must realize that the societies that modernized did so only after they rebelled against their history, tradition, and values... We must ask our religious heritage what it can do for us in our present and future... If it cannot do much for us we must abandon it.⁸⁵²

Nadim Bitar, a Western educated Sociologist, made a similar point. He believed the people's loyalty to Islam was the reason for Egypt's defeat in 1967, that Arabs would have to "stand naked before history" in order to remedy their predicament.⁸⁵³ Bitar was calling for the renunciation of Islam in favor of Marxism, as though deeply held religious beliefs could be annihilated at an instant, and an alien ideology thoroughly adopted just as instantaneously. His solution is no doubt far-fetched—as, indeed, every of the radical

⁸⁵² Cited in Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 35-36.

⁸⁵³ Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament*, 67.

top-down approach to remaking the Middle East has been—but in locating the resistance to successful political reform in beliefs that go deeper than politics, he identifies an obstacle in the way of modernizing reform those seeking to affect regime change in the Islamic world would be ill-advised to ignore.

Ajami's goes on to point out that each failed attempt to confront modernity also contributed to the resurgence and radicalization of Islam by delegitimizing alternatives amidst intense public frustration and resentment (or in the case of the Soviets' expulsion from Afghanistan by the Mujahideen, and the Islamic Revolution in 1979, by inspiring tremendous pride and a newfound confidence.) Together, the disappointments energized the men and women impatiently inveighing "Islam is the solution... The Qur'an is our constitution" and gave wide resonance to their message.⁸⁵⁴ This, incidentally, is the reason Saddam Hussein launched a faith campaign after the first Gulf War, one that permitted a dramatic intensification of religious sentiment in Iraq in the decade preceding the 2003 invasion. To shore up his regime's legitimacy in a world of intensifying conviction, he, too played Islam's champion.

Unfortunately, it is a barren kind of pride that animates groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, one that can tear down but cannot build up. Saudis welcome the American companies that extract the country's oil that to make the Kingdom's princes wealthy beyond measure, but they, in turn, use their wealth to fund the spread of anti-American

⁸⁵⁴ This is derived from the official creed of the Muslim Brotherhood, and is often chanted enthusiastically at their demonstrations: "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. The Qur'an is our law [constitution]. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope."

fanaticism. The educated, wealthy, *jihadist*, willing to die if he can use the fruit of Western science to kill untold civilians is another example of the pathology. In Ajami's words,

Thus the seeming contradiction between the reassertion of Islamic fundamentalism... and the unprecedented integration of the Arab world into the world economy and the extensive political and cultural advances of the United States into the region is no contradiction at all. The two phenomena are twins. There comes a time in the life of nations when the outside world intrudes, when it appears with all its threats and temptations. People either respond to it coherently and competently or they lose their bearings. And if they do the latter, they need all kinds of psychological devices. Reassertion and chauvinism alternate with self-doubt and mimicry.⁸⁵⁵

Ajami published his book long before America's recent interventions in Iraq. But in the context of the framework he provides, there is every reason to fear that this most recent encounter with the modern world—the U.S.-led campaign to help bring constitutional democracy to Iraq—has been so effectively frustrated by the very force it now seems to be strengthening: a radicalized and politicized Islamic Resurgence. The terrible difficulty, the predicament of the work's title, is this: there is a world of difference between delegitimizing a government and building a successful one. The first is easy; the latter task takes the rarest of political gifts, enlightened statesmanship. As Ajami puts it in the context of Ayatollah Khomeini's appeal in the Arab world (something Iran current president has managed to duplicate): "Fundamentalism may be too incoherent to govern, but it can topple the world of the elites, shatter their illusions, demonstrate that they have surrendered to the ways of the aliens."⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵⁵ Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament*, 173.

⁸⁵⁶ Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament*, 209.

History, in other words, has never been governed by an invincible arrow pointing the way forward; “progress” is not automatic. In moments of societal stress or crisis, it can be easier to cling to sacred traditions long deteriorated, even when they are a cause of the crisis. It follows that where the *sharia* has been enforced – Gaza, Afghanistan, Iraq’s Anbar province – its enforcers have very often appeared deficient, even (or especially) to devout Muslims: in part, because religion becomes a means to power that corrupts; and in part because a society organized along traditional Islamic lines is no better than the modern alternatives at confronting the exigencies of the modern world. And yet, the appeal of radical Islam grows and grows. For pride tinged with resentment can lead men to cling to those things that define them, by which they can claim any kind of superiority; it is much harder to admit defeat and “stand naked before history” than it is to claim that with redoubled devotion, the implacable enemy can finally be overcome. And so the failures are blamed on the American and Israel and the moral superiority of Islam is trumpeted. Memories of the Crusades, Atatürk’s betrayal of Islam, the Six Days War (and more recently, American intervention in Iraq and apparently unconditional support for Israel) are reawakened; taken together, they “created a deep need for solace and consolation, [for which] Islam provided the needed comfort.”⁸⁵⁷ Thus, Islamic fundamentalists have leveraged persistent Arab angst masterfully to make “an eloquent and moving case” that the Arab world has declined so far from its apogee “because [Arabs have] lost their faith and bearings.”⁸⁵⁸

⁸⁵⁷ Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament*, 71.

⁸⁵⁸ Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament*, 61.

The Inevitable Impact of Western “Meddling”

There is another dynamic at work, however, that lends no end of energy to the movement. The perception—not without some basis in fact—that America and the West meddle in the Islamic world with complete and utter impunity to pursue their interest enrages fanatical attachment as only the perception of an existential threat can. And this, it must be recognized, is precisely what the West is as a consequence of its emphasis on promoting liberal democracy. Fundamentalists recognize what Westerners refuse to admit: Islam understood as comprehensive legal code *is* incompatible with liberal democracy. If the West succeeds at what it professes to want to do, it will by transforming the practice of Islam, by vanquishing the Islamist movement. To Islamists, the limitation of religion to a private sphere is tantamount to an alien religion; it is a radically incommensurable pattern of life. As Spinoza and Locke taught, nothing animates fanatical belief as well as the perception some other sect is trying to come between you and your God, especially where they are (or can be portrayed as) using coercive force to do it.

Eric Hoffer wrote in his classic study of the psychology of mass movements that the strength of a movement “is [usually] proportionate to the vividness and tangibility of its devil.”⁸⁵⁹ In this light, it is not hard to see why America and the West—all of modernity—make for a “Great Satan.” America’s military power is unmatched in history and she has legitimate security interests in the region. But that is not the narrative the fundamentalist understands. With carrier groups in every sea, cruise missiles that can

⁸⁵⁹ Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (New York: Harper Classics, 2002), 91.

pick a window, drones that see everything, and taps on every phone, America seems an empire that bestrides the world like a colossus indulging its every whim abroad so that the indulgence and debauchedness can go on at home. That is how they understand the threat. And to the excesses of modernity best represented by the West, the fundamentalist attributes all the region's problems.⁸⁶⁰ There is no appetite to modernize because they believe excessive modernization to be at the root of their problems. Thus, the solution is always the same: renewed commitment to a purer, militant, Islam.

Efforts to Modernize

The great Iranian thinker, Abdolkarim Soroush, has stated plainly that theological reform is a prerequisite of liberal democracy in the Islamic world.

You need some philosophical underpinning, even theological underpinning in order to have a real democratic system. Your God cannot be a despotic God anymore. A despotic God would not be compatible with democratic rule, with the idea of rights. So you even have to change your God.⁸⁶¹

There are, indeed, thinkers in both the Sunni and Shiite worlds trying to accomplish this.

A brief look at contemporary liberal movements in the Islamic world will reveal that not even those fighting to transform the Middle East from within are optimistic today.

⁸⁶⁰ Lest I be misunderstood, it is possible to explain the psychology of a thing without in any way endorsing or excusing it.

⁸⁶¹ Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush, available at:
<http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-HomaTV.html>.

Most agree that a liberalized Islam can only be achieved through *ijtihād*. The problem: *ijtihād*, or the application of independent reasoning to Islamic doctrine, is not always governed by a rationalistic or humanist attitude. New interpretations of Islamic law in light of human reason that aim to render religious practice more compatible with other aspects of modernity have been much less influential than those dominated by the fascistic impulse to forcibly mold every aspect of the individual, the religious community, and the state they live in according to the most radical interpretations. The most important and the most impressive liberal thinkers, moreover, have generally been deeply touched by the European Enlightenment and its dominant intellectual currents. Not surprisingly, this fact does not always endear those thinkers to their constituencies. If reforming the practice of Islam—the character of the *umma*, of citizenries—is a vital prerequisite of enduring political transformation, the fact liberal reformers are viewed with suspicion before their views are even seriously considered bodes ill for the prospect of meaningful reform in the short term.

In fact, that liberal and modernist reformers are losing ground against the background of the Resurgence of Islam is more or less the consensus view. Ali A. Allawi's contention that the fundamentalist Wahabbi/Salafi strain of interpretation has become dominant has already been noted. Bernard Lewis agrees, observing in a recent work that while “liberal theology has been an issue among Muslims in the past, and may be again in the future. It is not at the present time. The literal divinity and inerrancy of the Qur'an is a basic dogma of Islam, and although some may doubt it, none challenge it.” More pointedly, a 2008 RAND Institute study concluded that “liberal intellectuals who propose

the establishment of Western style democracy”—men of a disposition and motivated by aims reminiscent of Locke and Spinoza in the West—are “voices in the wilderness” with “little mass support in the Middle East” today.⁸⁶² Most recently, Robert Reilly has contended that “fundamentalist movements have come to dominate intellectual discourse in key Muslim countries” while the modernist movement—which “emphasized Islam’s compatibility with science and rationalism”—has effectively “been banished from the political and cultural scene.”⁸⁶³

Algeria’s Malek Bennabi

Modernists’ contentions are, nonetheless, worth examining, not least because of their tremendous influence in Turkey in the lead-up to its reinvention (which is the subject of Chapter 10). One of the most impressive liberal Islamic theorists of the twentieth century is a man virtually nobody has heard of. In fact, whereas the works of the three fundamentalist Islamist theorists discussed above are available in more than a dozen languages, instantly and free in the form of convenient pdf files, Malek Bennabi’s corpus has not yet been translated entirely into English, and the original French texts are in important cases almost impossible to locate.

Born to a wealthy family in Algeria, Malek Bennabi (1905-1975) attended both a local *madrassa* and a French Academy growing up. His parents’ wealth and his knowledge of

⁸⁶² RAND, *The Muslim World After 9/11*, 79-80.

⁸⁶³ Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 199.

French permitted him to attend university in Paris. His education afforded him an intimate acquaintance with Islam's major works of theology and philosophy and a thoroughgoing familiarity with "Western civilization and its classical and modern thinkers."⁸⁶⁴ Though a profound respect for the European Enlightenment's brightest lights is clearly discernable throughout his writings, he is no Europhile, and certainly not an uncompromising admirer of the modern (or post-modern) West. He argues that Islam—properly understood—supports, even demands, a form of democratic government. But not necessarily a democracy built according to the Western model. On his argument, the moral capital generated by Islam permits a higher form of participatory government, one less susceptible to the vagaries of selfish and narrowly concerned majorities. His works are well argued and compel the imagination. One contemporary American scholar calls him "one of the most significant intellectuals in modern... Islamic history."⁸⁶⁵ Unfortunately, commentators agree that his influence has been disproportionately limited.⁸⁶⁶ According to Allawi, "he was the last of the pre-radical thinkers of his generation"; his ideas—even in his home country—were more or less ignored against the impatient calls of Islamists and *jihadists*.⁸⁶⁷

Perhaps the problem was his criticism of Islam, even though he offered it in the spirit of a friend. An Algerian nationalist and a devoted Muslim, Bennabi believed Islamic civilization was in need of rehabilitation, a Renaissance and Reformation. He argued

⁸⁶⁴ Mohammad Mohaddessin, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press, 1993), 166.

⁸⁶⁵ Phillip Naylor, "The Formative Influence of French Colonialism on the Life and Thought of Malek Bennabi," *French Colonial History*, Vol. 7 (2006), 129.

⁸⁶⁶ cf. Zoubir, 4

⁸⁶⁷ Ali Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*. 69.

that the weakness of the Islamic world glaringly revealed by Napoleon's conquest of Egypt (and repeated over and over throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and indeed into the twenty-first) was not simply the fault of malicious external forces—Western aggression, imperialism, now neo-imperialism as Al-Banna, Qutb, Mawdudi, and other Islamists insist. He makes a much bolder argument (one that, for obvious reasons, was not universally embraced). While the popularizers of a militant *jihadist*-inclined Islam argued that Western civilization had grown decadent (if dangerously seductive and powerful) as it declined, Bennabi argued that it was Islamic civilization that was, in fact, decaying. This, in turn, accounted for the weakness of modern Muslim states, for the fact their territories were ripe for conquest and colonization. Muslim lands were colonized by the Western powers because the Islamic world had grown “colonizable”; consequently, “to liberate oneself from... colonialism, it is necessary to liberate oneself first from its cause—colonizability.”⁸⁶⁸ The economic and political dysfunction that continue to grip the Islamic world are the result of “deep-seated intellectual and socio-cultural causes”; one commentator goes so far as to argue that the Arab world will have to come to terms with key elements of Bennabi's thought before meaningful political and economic progress are likely to be achieved.⁸⁶⁹

Bennabi boldly argues that from the time of Averroes (he gives the extinguishing of the Almohad dynasty in Morocco in 1269 as the precise date), Islam's intellectual vitality has been slackening. Religion—which is also the primary spring (i.e., the source of energy

⁸⁶⁸ Quoted in Phillip Naylor, “The Formative Influence of French Colonialism on the Life and Thought of Malek Bennabi,” 136; his translation.

⁸⁶⁹ Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi

and direction) for society and culture in the Islamic world—had effectively been sapped of the capacity to inspire worthy political and cultural undertakings. In an arresting line that reminds of one of Leo Strauss’ dominant teachings—namely, that a civilization’s vitality is extinguished with the expiration of the tension between reason and revelation—he writes “Où l’âme fait défaut, c’est la chute et la décadence, tout se qui perd sa force ascensionnelle ne pouvant plus que descendre, attiré par une irrésistible pesanteur... L’impulsion coranique s’étant peu à peu amortie, le monde musulman s’est arrêté, comme un moteur s’arrête quand il a consommé son dernier litre d’essence.”⁸⁷⁰

That Bennabi chooses to date Islam’s decay to the vanquishing of Averroian thought is no doubt significant. Whatever one ultimately thinks of his philosophy, Averroes, deeply familiar with and influenced by the works of Plato and Aristotle, sought to reconcile the confident employment of man’s rational capacities with the revealed teachings of the Qur’an. His approach to religion and theology—which Leo Strauss, not unrevealingly, compares to Spinoza’s⁸⁷¹—was, in the thirteenth century, vanquished by Al-Ghazali’s ultra-literalist approach to the interpretation of revealed texts. In *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Al-Ghazali argued that Islam is true, that the philosophers cited by Averroes had not proven their doctrines, and that, as a result, those philosophers were to be rejected; where revelation and reason do not agree, revelation is always to be

⁸⁷⁰ Quoted in Roger Le Tournau, “Problèmes Musulmans d’Aujourd’hui,” *Revue française de science politique*, Année 1955, Volume 5, Numero 2, 414.

⁸⁷¹ Leo Strauss goes so far as to assert that Averroes’ criticism of religion is at the root of the mode of criticism in the West (“a more or less concealed war against religion”) that has made it possible for theorists “simply to disregard religion or to live as if religion did not exist” (Leo Strauss, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, 47).

privileged.⁸⁷² It should go without saying that in the Christian world Averroes' approach won out, not least because of the later decisive influence of men like Spinoza and Locke. Robert Reilly's recent *The Closing of the Muslim Mind* is a thorough examination of this insight; he agrees with Bennabi that a millennium-old epistemological debate between a philosopher and a theologian is the proximate cause of the current crisis of Islamic civilization. It is a testament to Bennabi's obscurity that Reilly has written a book about Bennabi's "colonizability" thesis without once mentioning the Algerian thinker.

For Bennabi, too, the enervation of intellectual life leads inevitably to a civilization's decay. What Bennabi calls the "post-Almohadien" era is defined, then, by what it is missing—intellectual and moral seriousness or vigor. The consequence, as Roger Le Torneau summarizes: "une société musulmane qui ne vit plus que de routine."⁸⁷³ A civilization attached to its deepest intellectual and moral commitments by rote repetition and routine expressions of fidelity—one that clings to its sacred teachings from alternating respect for and fear of authorities' decrees where the authorities themselves are blindly shackled to tradition rather than genuinely engaged with the place of their inherited beliefs and habits in a changing world—will inevitably lack both the confidence to defend itself, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Believers continue to profess the traditional beliefs and appear to live the old life, but in the shallowest possible way: without commitment, engagement, or understanding. It will lack these things first because it has lost a genuine appreciation for the reasons the way of life is worth

⁸⁷² cf., R.J. Kilcullen, 3-4.

⁸⁷³ Roger Le Torneau, "Problèmes Musulmans d'Aujourd'hui," 414.

defending, even sacrificing for. And it will be unable to revitalize itself because absent such an appreciation, it is impossible to say which elements of a way of life are essential and which not, which tenets are properly subject to adaptation to meet new exigencies, and which non-negotiable because they are of central and overriding importance to an inherently valuable system of beliefs.

In the case of Islam, the challenges posed by the ascendance of modernity and the dramatic increase of the power of the West aggravated the problem. The civilization was caught between unreflective adherence to traditions and diktat on the one hand, and the exigencies of a modern world, its terms increasingly defined by a civilization with a not altogether compatible set of sacred opinions on the other. Attempts to assimilate with the West through the 1970s did not succeed outside of Turkey—where we will see they succeeded imperfectly and at great cost—but instead provoked a fierce counter-revolution, its extent and potency apparent in starker relief every day.

Bennabi stands between those modernizers who sought to join the modern world at the cost of jettisoning elements essential to the civilization to which they were heirs, and those who today wish to destroy the modern West and all it stands for in the name of a radicalized but ultimately shallow understanding of Islamic law. At both extremes, he feared Islamic civilization would be unable to justify and defend itself. Either for failing to understand the worth of Islamic civilization and internalizing the *mores* of a more powerful but increasingly Godless and decadent rival (his *colonizabilité* thesis), or for unreflectively clinging to tradition from residual respect combined with a furious resentment of the

alternative, he believed the spiritual and theological vitality of Islamic civilization was imperiled.

Bennabi recognized, moreover, that modernity—the technologies, interconnectedness, wealth, and new appeals made possible by Western science and industry—precluded the simple recovery of a way of life and worship lost for almost a millennium, and therefore sought to prod the Islamic world willingly to embrace a “*modus vivendi* compatible avec les conditions d’une vie nouvelle”—a way of living inspired by Islamic tenets *and* compatible with the modern world.⁸⁷⁴ For this, in stark contrast to the twentieth century’s dominant Islamists, he argued that “une reform religieuse est necessaire.”⁸⁷⁵ Far from advocating the literal interpretation (and enforcement) of Islamic law, he argues for religious reform in the Muslim world so thoroughgoing as to be character transforming. Sacred opinions, habits, and social practices in the Islamic world would have to be transformed in much the same way the ideas promulgated by the West’s Enlightenment thinkers helped to form liberal democrats, our *mores* since sustained by our regime’s everyday educational institutions and influences. For he understood, with the West’s democratic theorists (Locke, Rousseau, Tocqueville), that the possibility of worthwhile democratic government rested on internalized ideas and habits.

He believed those ideas could be categorized in three ways: “as a feeling toward one’s self... as a feeling toward others... as a cluster of social and political conditions necessary

⁸⁷⁴ Roger Le Torneau, “Problèmes Musulmans d’Aujourd’hui,” 414.

⁸⁷⁵ Roger Le Torneau, “Problèmes Musulmans d’Aujourd’hui,” 415.

for the formulation and blossoming of similar feelings in the individual.”⁸⁷⁶ Taking England’s democracy as an example, he understood, as we often do not today, that “ce n’est pas un texte constitutionnel qui garantit les droits et les libertés du peuple anglais, mais la longue tradition démocratique britannique, c’est-à-dire en fin d’analyse l’esprit britannique lui-même.”⁸⁷⁷ For Bennabi, a people’s written constitution is less important than its spirit, a fact of immense consequence for the possibility of democratic reform in the Arab world. “La démocratisation n’est donc pas une simple transmission de pouvoirs entre deux partis, un roi et un peuple, par exemple, mais la formation de sentiments, de réflexe, de critères qui constituent les fondements d’une démocratie dans la conscience d’un peuple, dans ses traditions.”⁸⁷⁸ As Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi, who translated Bennabi’s *The Question of Ideas in the Muslim World*, explains, nothing is more important to the character of a civilization and the individuals who make it up than a system of “impressed” ideas. Transmitted by the civilization’s cultural and educational influences, they all but constitute the civilization; this

category of ideas makes up what he [Bennabi] considers the archetypes of society; these archetypes are the fundamental ideas and everlasting values constituting the axiomatic principles and ideational matrices handed down by successive generations almost intact or in their pristine state. Thus, they provide the essentials of the common character and cultural and historical continuity of civilization. In other words, the archetypes or impressed ideas constitute the core of civilization, and it is at this level that differences between civilizations really matter. In Bennabi’s view, the advent of any civilization in the true sense of the term can never be conceived without the existence of such archetypes or core ideas and enduring values whose prime role in sparking off human spiritual forces and channeling man’s vital energies has always been testified by history. To put in slightly

⁸⁷⁶ Yahia Zoubir, 5; his translation

⁸⁷⁷ Malek Bennabi, *Le Démocratie en Islam*.

⁸⁷⁸ Malek Bennabi, *Le Démocratie en Islam*.

different terms, the impressed ideas constitute the necessary foundations for the socio-historical existence and cultural identity of any human community.⁸⁷⁹

Bennabi sought to help establish in the Muslim world a new religious-political consciousness precisely because the vitality of Islamic civilization was disintegrating. He was at the same time adamant, however, that the importation of Western ideas and habits would be insufficient—in the first place, because they would stand little hope of taking hold (what salience or relevance could they possibly have in alien soil?);⁸⁸⁰ in the second, and perhaps more importantly, because he believed them to be fatally flawed and ultimately an insufficient support for the species of regime he hoped to help lay ground for. According to Bennabi, modern Europe had been “excluded from the religious phenomenon”; Europe’s civilization was, as a result, all but defined by what it lacked and could not accommodate; Europe, Bennabi tells us, has “no place for the divine.”⁸⁸¹ For that reason, modern Europe (here, Bennabi has in mind the Europe of Machiavelli, Bacon, and Hobbes) is “a power-driven culture with technical materialistic roots.” A man influenced by such a culture “will populate his solitude with objects, since his domineering look drives to acquisition” (Ibid., 3). The regimes of the West have, indeed, been organized to precisely this end: by freeing man’s avarice from all moral constraints, and by bestowing upon man the freedom to define good for himself and pursue that good (most often greed) at infinitum, the modern West is today wealthier and more powerful than any previous civilization could have conceived of becoming.

⁸⁷⁹ Malek Bennabi, *The Question of Ideas in the Muslim World*, ix-x

⁸⁸⁰ cf. Yahia Zoubir, “Algerian Islamists’ Conception of Democracy,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* (Summer 2006),

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2501/is_n3_v18/ai_19129732/?tag=content;coll

⁸⁸¹ Malek Bennabi, *The Question of Ideas in the Muslim World*, 3.

Bennabi sought to move the Islamic world in the direction of democracy—of *limited* democracy even—but he sought to do while returning to and rehabilitating key elements of Islamic doctrine long dispensed with by its popular exponents. Islam could improve the Western model by imparting to our form of government “le sens de la valeur morale qui manque au vieil esprit moderne.”⁸⁸² It is not enough to allow individuals the unfettered freedom to pursue goods; the political community must confidently maintain a role in shaping its members’ conception of what is good. As Bennabi puts it, Muslim society has to do more than merely distribute ‘goods’; “it has also to distribute ‘good.’”⁸⁸³

In other words, Bennabi believed a better form of democracy—solidly buttressed against tyranny as well as morally upright—could be erected on a foundation appropriate to the region’s citizenries: “in the spirit of Islam in general,” as he puts it.⁸⁸⁴ Thus, Zoubir summarizes, Bennabi’s “efforts were concentrated on creating a genuinely democratic psychology,” what he believed could be accomplished from a “rational understanding of Islam.”⁸⁸⁵ By undoing the damage al-Ghazali had done in the philosophic sphere, and which Ibn Taymiyya had done in the legal sphere—by opening the Muslim mind and the gates of *ijtihad* by reasserting the authority of reason—meaningful political reform could ultimately be built on a suitable societal sensibility.

⁸⁸² Roger Le Tournau, “Problèmes Musulmans d’Aujourd’hui,” 415.

⁸⁸³ Malek Bennabi, *The Question of Ideas in the Muslim World*, 8.

⁸⁸⁴ Quoted in Yahia Zoubir, “Algerian Islamists’ Conception of Democracy,” near beginning.

⁸⁸⁵ Yahia Zoubir, “Algerian Islamists’ Conception of Democracy,” near end.

He locates in Islam's sacred texts support for consultative government, individual political rights, a guarantee of privacy and private property vis a vis the government, even protections for minorities (religious minorities—even Jews—in particular).⁸⁸⁶ He accomplishes this by following Averroes' mode of scriptural interpretation: tension between revealed moral absolutes and the fruit of rational investigation (even of sacred tenets) is permissible; in fact, it is an indispensable source of cultural vitality.

Most fundamentally, Bennabi, like Averroes, differs from his modern Salafi counterparts in his rejection of the claim that genuine faith demands the complete subordination of the human intellect to God's will as revealed by the Qur'an and the *hadiths* (interpreted with a brutal literalness). Where revealed teachings contradict honest and good-faith rational investigation—into the propriety of commandments, even the appropriateness of those commandments in the modern world—Averroes and Bennabi argue that it is proper for a pious Muslim to interpret the former allegorically. As Phillip Naylor explains, “of the utmost concern for Bennabi is the conception of reason and science as utterly antithetical to religion and revelation”—an argument that was being made with increasing frequency by fundamentalists; “in a theme common to all his publications,” Bennabi, in contrast, “believed in the virtues of the rational intellect and saw it as compatible with spirituality.”⁸⁸⁷ This flexibility, taken together with Bennabi's emphasis on those Islamic teachings most compatible with liberal democracy, could, he argues, form the basis of a

⁸⁸⁶ Yahia Zoubir, “Algerian Islamists' Conception of Democracy,” near end.s

⁸⁸⁷ Phillip Naylor, “The Formative Influence of French Colonialism on the Life and Thought of Malek Bennabi,” 133.

social psychology appropriate to liberal democratic government that is at once liberal and moderate, and hospitable to modern science and industry.

Bennabi is the only Islamic thinker Qutb takes the time to engage directly in *Milestones*. He does not mention Bennabi by name, but rather calls him “an Algerian author who writes in French,” no doubt to discredit him in the eyes of those who have been touched by the ideas expressed by Muslim Brotherhood thinkers.⁸⁸⁸ Qutb attributes Bennabi’s errors to his Eurocentrism (though he does not use the term) and even admits having once fallen into the same trap. It is tempting to be seduced by the glitz of the West, Qutb effectively admits, to come to associate civilization itself with Western civilization. That, Qutb believes, is Bennabi’s mistake. He tried to make Islam more conducive to Western ways of organizing society for becoming infatuated by its charms. Qutb goes on to explain that wiping that impression from his own mindset—the prerequisite of his realization that the civilization really means universal “obedience to the Divine law”—was what allowed his thought to mature.

It is worth repeating that Allawi is articulating the consensus view when he states that “Bennabi’s sensibilities never reached a wide audience in the Muslim world.” In so many ways, Islamists today have inoculated large populations against the ideas of modernizers. Why does Qutb resonate while Bennabi is more or less ignored? Allawi suggests that his dearth of influence is largely attributable to the fact his “programme was not couched in political terms.”⁸⁸⁹ *International Crisis Group* explains his dearth of influence along the

⁸⁸⁸ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 90.

⁸⁸⁹ Ali Al. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 72.

same lines: for divorcing his writing from the pressing political exigencies of the Muslim world, he seemed a disconnected intellectual elite and was therefore “influential only in the universities.”⁸⁹⁰ In other words, the most impressive feature of his thought—the emphasis on the importance of anchoring political transformation to the prior emergence of a new social consciousness—also accounts for his failure to exert influence on the scope of the radical Islamists. Bennabi was a careful thinker forced to confront demagogues lamenting the fierce urgency of now. Their louder, apparently more pressing complaints, were bolstered both by the very obvious political and economic frustrations endured by so many in the Muslim world (what was especially the case in Algeria), as well as by their willingness to seize power, and elsewhere advocate its seizure, to impatiently enact the reforms they were demanding. Bennabi had to be measured and patient because he believed it necessary to affect sacred opinions; winning hearts and minds is not a task accomplished over night.

Islamists’ Use and Abuse of Democratic Institutions in Algeria

Their disproportionate influence of fundamentalist Islam as compared to modernist Islam is especially apparent even in Bennabi’s Algeria. In their heyday between 1989 (the beginning of party pluralism in Algeria) and 1992 (the exclusion of the most radical party from the system), Algerian Islamists went to great lengths to delegitimize democracy as a form of government utilizing the constitutional and institutional features of the regime

⁸⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, “Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page,” 30 July, 2004, 3.

itself. The Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) had the most political success of the Islamist factions, actually contesting elections on a platform harshly critical of the country's new democratic constitution and institutions. Their anti-democratic platform ultimately proved much more influential than Bennabi's brand of religious reform, the latter put forth for the sake of ennobling democracy in the Islamic world.

In Algeria, the Islamist populism that burst forth in the 1990s grew out of the "free mosques" initiative that had permitted the establishment of independent mosques by the thousands the decade before. Much as new liberties contributed to religious radicalization in Iraq, so it did in Algeria almost two decades before. Fiery priests embraced the Salafi tradition, radicalizing the population, calling for political action in service of fundamentalist beliefs. Significantly, their radical outlook gained traction even though the state was not suppressing, but rather tolerating—publically and legally—their Islamic opposition.⁸⁹¹

Incredible though it seems to us in the West on its face, though it is an increasingly common tactic in the Muslim world, Islamists in Algeria sought power by democratic means while promising to undo important elements of the country's democratic regime. As International Crisis Group summarizes, "the FIS [ISF in English] tended to subvert the 1989 constitution to which it owed its own legal existence, not only by advocating an Islamic state, but equally by denouncing democracy as 'infidel' (*kufr*)."⁸⁹² Much could

⁸⁹¹ cf. International Crisis Group, "Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page," 6.

⁸⁹² International Crisis Group, "Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page," 4.

have been learned from Algeria's political traumas since independence; in fact, the incessant violence and political paralysis endured by Algerians for nearly a half century as the country struggled to become independent, and subsequently democratic, illustrate very well the dependence of a regime's written constitution on supportive social habits and political opinions. A leader of Algeria's ISF, Ali Benjadj, explained Islam's incompatibility with democracy in terms that are often repeated by fundamentalists throughout the Muslim world today, but with a specificity unique to Algeria and Iraq, Arab regimes with ostensibly democratic constitutions:

Article 6 [of the Algerian Constitution] proclaims that the people is the source of all power. This means that political parties which will emerge could, God forbid, lead the people in an anti-religious path. The only source of power is Allah, through the Qur'an. The people intervenes to choose a chief of state, and at this level only does it become a source of power. If the people votes against God's Law, this is nothing but blasphemy. In this eventuality, the '*ulema*' order the killing of the infidels because the latter wishes to substitute their authority for that of God.⁸⁹³

As noted previously, Sunni Islamists in Iraq not infrequently made similar arguments as the country tried to elaborate a democratic constitution against the backdrop of a brutal insurgency. The Algerian experience ought to have foreshadowed exactly this problem. A recent report dedicated to the effects of Islamism in North Africa summarizes its findings thus:

the rise of Islamist movements in North Africa has not been predicated on the absence of reform, but has generally occurred in conjunction with ambitious government reform projects... the spectacular rise of the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria in 1989-1991 occurred in the context of the government's liberalization of the political system.

⁸⁹³ Muhammad Mohaddessin, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 149.

...how democratic reform in North Africa can be achieved without destabilizing the region's political systems is a fundamental and entirely valid question which has received far too little attention.⁸⁹⁴

In other words, the rise of radical Islamism in Algeria was not the consequence of a lack of political liberties and participatory government, but rather, as has been the case in Iraq, the new political rights and freedoms extended to groups and individuals as a part of the democratizing process actually helped to fuelled the radicalism. In the eyes of a significant proportion of the population, the institutions of participatory government amount to little more than peaceful means by which to attain political power. Factions with radically different conceptions of what the regime should pursue as its *raison d'être* are thereby forced to share power. Dysfunction is the best of the likely outcomes.

If the appeal of *jihadism* in the Qutbist model ebbs and flows,⁸⁹⁵ no observer can deny that “the Society [the Muslim Brotherhood] has been inhibited from breaking clearly with the illiberal aspects of Al-Banna’s thought.” As a result, Islamist groups that today tolerate or embrace participatory government tend to do so with the expectation that elections will empower them to establish regimes that are in important respects distinctly illiberal. The institutions of democracy are used to gain power. Unfortunately, the ill use of that power proceeds to further undermine the regime’s legitimacy in the eyes of those who are not at its helm.

⁸⁹⁴ International Crisis Group, “Islamism in North Africa I”, 20 April, 2004. 1-2.

⁸⁹⁵ International Crisis Group, “Islamism in North Africa II,” 20 April, 2004, 10.

CHAPTER IX

AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI'S POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION, AND A PROPOSAL FOR AN ISLAMIC REFORMATION

The doctrinal similarities between the twentieth century Sunni Islamists responsible for the resurgence of Islam in the Arab world, and Ayatollah Khomeini, the most important exponent of an assertive form of political Islam among contemporary Shiite scholars, are remarkable in character and extent. In fact, the writings of Qutb and Mawdudi are said to have exerted a profound influence on the disaffected students who led the Iranian Revolution, even in spite of their anti-Shiite aspects; Ayatollah Khomeini himself acknowledges his familiarity with Qutb in his own writings, and he is said to have met Mawdudi personally in the late 1960s.⁸⁹⁶ Though Khomeini's thought was more radical than the vast majority of his contemporaries in Iran (especially in his insistence on the establishment of a theocracy),⁸⁹⁷ his ideas gained increased salience in Iran, both among scholars and the wider population, in the years leading up to the Revolution and especially in the decades since.⁸⁹⁸ Just as political frustrations increased the salience of radicalized interpretations of Islamic law on the Sunni side, so it was the Shah's ambitious program to secularize Iran, followed by a long war with the brutal secular dictator next door, that rallied many Iranians behind Khomeini's radical platform.⁸⁹⁹ The popular uprisings that convulsed Iran in 2009 demonstrated that the Revolution's Islamist

⁸⁹⁶ Yvonne Y. Haddad, "Sayyid Qutb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival" in John Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 68.

⁸⁹⁷ Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah* (Bethesda, Adler & Adler Publishers, Inc.), 137.

⁸⁹⁸ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trial of Political Islam*, trans. Anthony Roberts (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 109.

⁸⁹⁹ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad*, 111.

ideology is far from homogenous; commentators are, nonetheless, agreed that the ideology of the Revolution has a wide following in the country, especially outside its urban centers.

Khomeini, whose thought remains the best expression of that ideology, agrees with Sunni Islamists on most points of political consequence:⁹⁰⁰ the separation of church and state along Western lines is anathema to Islam, properly understood; the state's coercive authority should be utilized to enforce *sharia*, often by threat of terrifying corporal punishment; the scope of government authority and its reach into the lives of men and women should be almost unlimited; Islamic government is only possible where the people have more or less universally internalized Islamic *mores*, a process that should be ubiquitous and begin at an early age; *sharia* is, by its divine nature, both anti-democratic and illiberal; the legacy of the enlightenment—man's confidence in the sufficiency of his intellect—is the great impediment to faithful submission; the West—in particular, the glorification of indulgence and our rampant materialism—represents a seductive and existential threat to Islam, in particular, and religiosity, in general; Muslims are duty-bound to participate in a violent struggle against non-Islamic rulers in the name of establishing fully Islamic political communities; modern reinterpretation of the Qur'an and the *hadiths* is expressly prohibited by the dictates of Islam itself, and would-be modernizers, imposters with nefarious intentions; etc., etc., etc.

Sunni and Shiite Islamists agree, then, on the overall spirit and purpose of Islamic government: Khomeini, like Qutb, insists that the establishment of a totalitarian Islamic

⁹⁰⁰ Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 144-145.

state—that is, a government that regulates every aspect of economic and social life, reaching deep into the lives of individuals—is the prerequisite of establishing justice on earth. His purpose, like theirs, is without doubt a noble one. For Khomeini, bringing about justice on earth so far as possible and raising human beings above the level of a beast, are the reasons the Qur'an was revealed. Throughout his political writings, but especially on this point, the sophistication of Khomeini's understanding is philosophically more impressive than those advanced by his Sunni counterparts. In fact, his argument in favor of Islamic government hinges on an understanding of man's nature very similar to those advanced by the great modern philosophers of the Western tradition: man's selfishness and his egoism are a—perhaps the—central problem of political life. The solution he proposes, however, has a fair bit more in common with the surface political teachings presented in Plato's utopian dialogues.⁹⁰¹ It is not enough to build a regime in which the deficiencies of human nature are harnessed to communal benefit (greed used to incentivize labor and drive production), or otherwise well enough contained to prevent the crimes dwelling in the hearts of men from exerting pernicious real world effects. Rather, man's bestial nature must be refined and improved in an environment crafted, from top to bottom, through and through, in light of a superhuman—that is, a divine—understanding. The redemption of man and the political community in which he lives

⁹⁰¹ As Mahmoud and Ahmad Sadri put it, “the right-wing, clerical ideal of a true Islamic community of virtue is profoundly influenced by authoritarian interpretations of Platonic and Aristotelian thought. The elites who took over the reigns of power in Iran conceived of themselves more as ‘enlightened despots’ than as Shi’ite vice regents of the ‘occulted Imam.’” Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri, “Introduction,” in Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, trans. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), xv-xvi.

depends entirely on the real-world instantiation of God's laws, precisely as they were revealed.

Khomeini's most important disagreement with contemporary Sunni commentators concerns the scholars' role in bringing about such a political community. Owing in part to the doctrinal disagreement that yielded the split between Sunni and Shiite Muslims in the first place (on the question of the fourth Caliph's rightful successor), Khomeini argues that morally upright religious scholars may today —indeed, *must* in the present age— claim temporal authority equivalent (or almost equivalent as we will see) to that of the Prophet and the first twelve Imams. This does not imply equality of station or status (a point the scholar underlines); their political roles must, however, be comparable at the current juncture. As Khomeini puts it in *Islamic Government*,

When we say that after the Occultation, the just *faqih* [experts in Islamic law] has the same authority that the Most Noble Messenger and the Imams had, do not imagine that the status of the *faqih* is identical to that of the Imams and the Prophet. For here we are not speaking of status, but rather of function. By 'authority' we mean government, the administration of the country, and the implementation of the sacred laws of the *shari'a*.⁹⁰²

Thus, in Iran today, as a consequence of the Constitution bequeathed by Khomeini, a council of conservative religious experts oversees every official, every election, every law, every coercive instrument of the state, every important political decision. The interpretation of Islamic law that informed the Iranian Revolution and the country's present constitution, and which has exerted a profound influence on Iraq's Shiite communities (among other Shiite enclaves from Saudi Arabia to Afghanistan) is, like its

⁹⁰² Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, in Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution I*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 62.

radicalized and politicized Sunni cousin, inhospitable to majoritarian government that is at once limited and tolerant—a point those who led the Iranian revolution themselves continue to emphasize. Unlike its Sunni counterpart, however, Khomeini demands that scholars play a preeminent political role—not just guiding the people, but arranging all of human society in such a way that virtuous human behavior has the support necessary that it become habitual and ubiquitous. The powerful arguments he advances to support these claims, on behalf of which he asserts the authority of Islam, have both helped to demonize the United States in the minds of many pious Muslims while simultaneously delegitimizing essential ideational prerequisites of liberal democracy.

Un-Separating Church and State in Iran

The argument that Islam prohibits separating the affairs of God from the affairs of a temporal government, thereby to reduce an individual's practice of his faith to a private relationship with God, is familiar by now. Khomeini goes even further than Qutb and other Sunni thinkers, however. In his political expressions, he claims that the separation of church and state is not only un-Islamic, but unchristian too, a long running and deliberate attempt by the Godless West to weaken, even to destroy, Abrahamic civilization. His criticism of the Shah (whose reforms were modeled on Atatürk's) tracks this line exactly: efforts to secularize Iran's government and its universities were not well-meaning efforts to liberalize and modernize society and the state, but rather, deliberate attacks on Islam designed to weaken Iran. In particular, Khomeini condemns the Shah's

efforts to marginalize the clerical class, what he equates to an attempt to replicate the Western separation between religion and politics, which would be at the same time to destroy Iran's Islamic identity.⁹⁰³ Speaking in Iraq one year before he returned to Iran to replace the Shah, Khomeini encouraged followers gathered in Najaf to reject the notion that religious practice is rightfully a private activity, and to instead support the intensifying unrest in Iran in the name of their Islamic faith:

The imperialists know full well how active the religious scholars are, and what an activist and militant religion Islam is. So they drew up a plan to bring the religious scholars into disrepute, and for several centuries propagated the notion that religion must be separated from politics. Some of our *akhunds* [clerics] came to believe it and began asking, 'What business do we have with politics?' The posing of this question means the abandonment of Islam; it means burying Islam in our cells in the *madrasa*. It means burying Islam in our books! The imperialists dearly wish that religion could be separated from politics, and our politicians, in turn, have filled people's mouths with these words, so that some of us have come to believe them and ask, 'What business do we have with politics? Leave politics to those whose business it is, and if they slap us in the face, let us turn the other cheek.'⁹⁰⁴

According to Khomeini, to relegate Islam to the private realm would be to neutralize the most powerful galvanizing force available to the Muslim world, thereby leaving it ripe for conquest. Moreover, Khomeini recognizes that this noxious modern idea would, if it spread, undermine the power of the scholars, both "prevent[ing] religion from ordering the affairs of this world and shaping Muslim society," and creating, as a result, "a rift between the scholars of Islam, on the one hand, and the masses" on the other.⁹⁰⁵ He repeats, in a number of places, that "this slogan of the separation of religion and politics

⁹⁰³ Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini, "The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt" (January 2, 1980 interview) in Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution I*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 334.

⁹⁰⁴ Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini, "In Commemoration of the First Martyrs of the Revolution," in Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution I*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 219.

⁹⁰⁵ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 38.

and the demand that religious scholars not intervene in social and political affairs have been formulated and propagated by the imperialists” for self-serving political reasons. On his account, the West was willing to destroy Islam “to gain dominance over our people and plunder our resources.”⁹⁰⁶ With the example of what some have called the “post-Christian” West in mind, Khomeini alleges that devotion to God and public observance of *sharia* will inevitably atrophy absent assertive state support for religion given the self-indulgent nature of man. He goes so far, in fact, as to deny that Jesus taught Christians to render unto Caesar authority over a large temporal sphere within which the claims of God were legitimately limited.⁹⁰⁷ To do so, Khomeini claims, would be tantamount to teaching followers to accept unjust rule and oppression. Jesus was “sent to root out injustice” like all prophets; Khomeini argues here (and frequently elsewhere) that the teachings of the Gospels were distorted by those seeking to appropriate the power of religion for self-aggrandizing ends—in this case, to extend the sphere of the secular state. It is tempting to accuse Khomeini of doing the same thing, of marshalling the power of Islam in the service of personal ambition, as, indeed, many of his contemporaries among Iran’s religious elite did in the years before he assumed unquestioned leadership of the Revolution.⁹⁰⁸ His repeated use of Islam to substantiate arguments that would enhance his own political position (and the importance of the scholarly class generally) do not, however, appear merely to be overblown rhetorical devices crafted for narrowly self-serving political reasons. Khomeini does not come across as a demagogue interested in

⁹⁰⁶ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 38.

⁹⁰⁷ Khomeini, “The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt” (January 2, 1980 interview), 341.

⁹⁰⁸ Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah*, 137.

power for the sake of power; rather, he appears to be genuinely committed to the righteousness of his cause, and believes his role to be indispensable. Indeed, he makes clear that he would prefer the scholars play a supervisory role; he foresaw the possibility of direct political engagement, but saw it as a last resort (a necessary corrective where the community's politicians failed to perform their tasks in the correct spirit). In his words, "yes, the religious scholar will have a role in government. He does not want to be the ruler."⁹⁰⁹ Moreover, Khomeini purports to prove that Islam, properly construed, is an assertive political religion by the interpretative methodology most Islamic scholars have considered to be determinative: by understanding Muhammad's actions at the dawn of Islam, as reported in the Qur'an and by *hadiths* of most trusted provenance. Proving this is not a heroic task.⁹¹⁰ Time and time again, Khomeini emphasizes that Muhammad was a warrior and a ruler, a man who lay down laws and drew his sword to ensure his laws were observed, and their reach, extended. When he appointed a successor, moreover, he appointed a man who would execute the law, not a man who would limit himself to expounding and interpreting the articles of faith:⁹¹¹

He began his mission alone, prepared himself for thirteen years, and then fought for a decade. He did not ask himself, 'What business do I have with politics?' Instead, he administered the entire Islamic realm. The same was true of the Commander of the Faithful [Abu Bakr] (upon whom be peace): he ruled, engaged in politics, and fought wars, never saying, "Let me sit at home and

⁹⁰⁹ Khomeini, "The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt" (January 2, 1980 interview), 341.

⁹¹⁰ To recall an earlier point, the tension between the tenets of Islamic law and religiously impermissible laws of state was often ignored over the course of Ottoman history. This was generally possible where the *ulema* was institutionally separated from the levers of political power, and self-consciously restrained in its criticism of the ruler for reasons of self-interest.

⁹¹¹ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 40.

devote myself to prayer and devotional reading; what business do I have with politics.”⁹¹²

In short, to relegate Islam to dusty books, to reduce it to a religion of personal devotion or theological argumentation, is to abdicate Islam’s vital this-worldly role. It is sacrilegious. The notion that the political sphere should abandon efforts to see virtue instantiated in human beings who are, by nature alone, no better than beasts is equivalent, for Khomeini, to welcoming injustice into the world with open arms—an intolerable and impious position.

Justice Requires Totalitarian Government

It bears repeating that on the Islamist understanding, tyrannical government is not necessarily the antithesis of free government; *tyrannical government is the antithesis of just government*. Just laws, in turn, are not dedicated to preserving individual freedom; rather, just laws promote virtue and piety in the political community, what often requires the significantly restriction of man’s liberty (and therewith, pointedly, his liberty to sin). As Khomeini explains in *Islamic Government*, a regime that uses the coercive authority of the state to enforce “evil” laws—laws not given by God—and which, therefore, makes human beings worse by its laws, is the genuinely tyrannical regime (one which Muslims are duty-bound to struggle against).⁹¹³ Khomeini’s many disagreements with modern liberal political theorists are nicely encapsulated by his belief that no form of government that fails to regulate every aspect of life according to Islam’s revealed teachings has established

⁹¹² Khomeini, “In Commemoration of the First Martyrs of the Revolution,” 220.

⁹¹³ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 92.

the conditions under which decent political life can flourish on earth. (The degree of coercion required depends on the degree to which the community is upright enough to obey the laws willingly and induce obedience by communal application of ‘peer pressure’.) This conclusion follows from his assessment of mankind in its original state—that is, the state of man absent the guidance of the Qur’an—an assessment that is at least as pessimistic as Hobbes’:

In his unredeemed state, man is like an animal, even worse than the other animals. Left to his own devices, he will always be inferior to the animals, for he surpasses them in passion, evil, and rapacity. As originally created, man is superior to all other beings, but at the same time, his capacities for passion, anger, and other forms of evil are virtually boundless.⁹¹⁴

Limited forms of government, those which are “concerned only with the prevention of disorder and not with the moral refinement of the people,” deserve his opprobrium not only for failing even to try to raise members of the political community above the level of beasts, but for permitting—even abetting!—mankind’s decline beneath the merely bestial.⁹¹⁵ According to Khomeini, by securing a generous private sphere, limited forms of government inevitably amplify the selfish passions of man, his avarice and egoism. Furthermore, the repeated indulgence of low appetites serves to strengthen their pull, thereby amplifying the accompanying vices, many of them corrosive to decent political life. The individual is harmed too. Khomeini repeatedly asserts that the kind of debauched self-indulgence so characteristic of life in the West—and so naturally appealing to the young—thus serves, in the end, to weaken the soul’s capacity for refinement and salvation. Those who do not commit (who are not forced to commit) to

⁹¹⁴ Khomeini, “The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt” (January 2, 1980 interview), 330-331.

⁹¹⁵ Khomeini, “The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt” (January 2, 1980 interview), 330.

his brand of Islam early in their lives will, he fears, become unmovable by its promises and incapable of its hard demands later on.

On this view, it is liberty that corrupts above all. The principles to which the American regime is devoted constitute, for Khomeini, conditions sure to promote vice and debauchedness among men and women. Thus, the West's seductive appeal, especially to the insatiable and burning appetites of young men, constituted a special problem in his mind; America, for Khomeini as for Qutb, represented the great seductive Satan, the powerful corrosive force standing in the way of the establishment of just and pious political communities on earth. Divine government, in stark contrast to Western models, improves human beings and political communities alike by encouraging, cajoling, and (where necessary) forcing men and women to practice virtue—by, in a word, limiting liberty rather than government. This is why Islam was revealed; as Khomeini puts it, “it was the task of the prophets to reform the natural dimensions of man in order that it might become the means of his ascent.”⁹¹⁶

Politics on earth is thus the means by which Islam can have transformative effect: “Law is a tool and an instrument for the establishment of justice in society, a means for man's intellectual and moral reform and his purification. Law exists to be implemented for the sake of establishing a just society that will morally and spiritually nourish and refine human beings.”⁹¹⁷ Legitimate laws are those given by God. Lawmaking is far too important to be relegated to the purview of human beings, far too important to be left to

⁹¹⁶ Khomeini, “The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt” (January 2, 1980 interview), 332.

⁹¹⁷ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 80.

a temporal sphere durably cut off from the divine. To reemphasize a previous point of considerable importance, human beings are so disappointingly constituted on this view that absent the political establishment of a very demanding moral code—one that induces obedience by fear of horrific punishments in this world and the next—man’s lowest appetites will always prevail to disastrous political effect, destroying everything good and noble in the political community. As a result, like Qutb, Khomeini denies that human beings are constituted in such a way as to be able to make their own (just or edifying) laws by democratic means.⁹¹⁸ Left to fallen men, the laws will become mere tools, crafted to serve passion and appetite. Islam is the *only* edifying constitution available to man. What could be worse—*what could make an individual worse*—than being forced to obey laws made by the vice-ridden selfish and egotistic majority? This, for Khomeini, is the difference between Islamic government and modern forms of democracy and constitutional government. As he puts it,

the fundamental difference between Islamic government... and constitutional monarchies and republics... is this: whereas the representatives of the people or the monarch in such regimes engage in legislations, in Islam the legislative power and competence to establish laws belongs exclusively to God Almighty. The Sacred Legislator of Islam is the sole legislative power.⁹¹⁹

Only God is sufficiently intelligent, upright—in a word, Godlike—as to give laws that will improve men. Revelation constitutes the way to a just and virtuous regime. It is not up to man to pick and choose among commandments; they must all be instituted. The Qur’an, Khomeini emphasizes again, was not revealed simply for the speculative pleasure

⁹¹⁸ Khomeini, “The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt” (January 2, 1980 interview), 330.

⁹¹⁹ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 55.

of a religious class, nor was it revealed merely to guide the individual's private relationship with God. On his account, to reduce the political role of Islam in the way contemporary Christians constrain the religious sphere to private spiritual matters is effectively "to deny prophethood," what amounts to a rejection of the first pillar of faith and the ultimate sacrilege. In stark contrast, the Qur'an "was revealed to make men into men," and its purview is unlimited: "all matters of worldly and social concern are means to this end."⁹²⁰

Much as the Sunni Islamist thinkers insisted that Islamic law should regulate the totality of human life, so Khomeini explains that the character of the *sharia* requires the establishment of a state that administers the "political, economic, and cultural affairs of society." To convey the scope and reach of revealed law in a properly organized Islamic state, Khomeini lists the spheres regulated by *sharia*, a litany that touches on the individual's dealings with neighbors, clansmen, children, relatives; "the concerns of private and marital life"; war and peace; commerce; the state's penal law; trade; agriculture; courtship and procreation; prenatal care; breastfeeding; childrearing; etc.⁹²¹ Hardly anything remains outside the purview of Islam; there is no properly private sphere. In addition to laws and norms that regulate the totality of social life, Khomeini insists on the necessity of both fear-inspiring corporal punishments and a species of education that verges on programming.

⁹²⁰ Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini, "Fifth Lecture on Surat Al-Fatiha: The Same thing in Different Languages," in Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution I*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 415.

⁹²¹ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 43.

Far from aspiring to assure equal treatment before laws that protect against unjust deprivations of life, liberty, and property, the goal of Islamic government is to make men and women virtuous and good, what often requires limiting liberty and extracting obedience by fear, force, and indoctrination. Khomeini goes so far as to assert that the imposition of “certain bonds on the evil forces present in man”—that is, restraints on individuals’ freedom to act according to their desires, passions, inclinations, etc.—is responsible for “whatever good and blessedness exists in this world.”⁹²² The best restraints are those mandated by God; thus, the cleric regrets that the terrifying penalties mandated by the Qur’an and the *Sunna*—80 lashes for drinking, 100 for adultery—“have virtually become part of the occult,” discussed out of an antiquarian curiosity, but rarely ever enforced systematically.⁹²³ This, too, is a symptom of decline, yet another consequence of Western ideas that have been infiltrating the Islamic mind for centuries. The punishments mandated in Islamic law represent, for Khomeini, “the best penal code ever devised for humanity,” and his condemnation of those who have forgotten and ignored those aspects of *sharia* is particularly harsh.⁹²⁴ Noting that the Prophet himself enforced Islam’s penal code, he insists that no Muslim can justifiably ignore those provisions, however uncomfortable they may be to modern (Western) sensibilities. For they are both mandated by God and absolutely essential: both to the establishment of order in society and to the overriding “duty to preserve Islam.” Islam, Khomeini insists again and again, is not just a private spiritual faith; it is a comprehensive system of laws,

⁹²² Khomeini, “The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt” (January 2, 1980 interview), 332.

⁹²³ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 74.

⁹²⁴ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 75.

punishments, *mores*, and daily practices that determine every facet of life. Preserving Islam means reifying its commands through and through, down to the last lash. This latter obligation—the preservation of Islam (which he raises in the context of preserving its penal code)—is, for Khomeini, “one of the most important obligations incumbent upon us... more necessary even than prayer and fasting.” Muhammad did not “content himself with the promulgation of law; rather, he implemented it at the same time, cutting off hands and administering lashings and stonings.”⁹²⁵ Khomeini makes a point of emphasizing that “bringing into being the Islamic state” requires following the Prophet’s example in all matters. And as he goes on to explain, “it is for the sake of fulfilling this duty that blood must sometimes be shed.”⁹²⁶

It is the sad reality, on this understanding, that brutal corporal punishments are needed in modern times more than ever. Like Qutb, Khomeini is particularly concerned about the prevalence of “sexual vice” today, and notes that it has reached “such proportions that it is destroying entire generations, corrupting our youth, and causing them to neglect all forms of work,” first among these, one presumes, strict adherence to religious obligations.⁹²⁷ The purpose of public stoning, flogging, and dismemberment, furthermore, is not so much to correct the one being punished or to exact a just punishment, as it is intended to deter others from falling into vice: “Why should it be regarded as harsh if Islam stipulates that an offender be publicly flogged in order to

⁹²⁵ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 40.

⁹²⁶ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 75.

⁹²⁷ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 34.

protect the younger generation from corruption?”⁹²⁸ If an individual is corrupt or evil beyond the possibility correction, to make an example of him in a way that improves those who can be improved is, perhaps, the best possible use of such a man. Spectacular punishments are a part, an essential part, of the kind of demanding environment most likely to nurture virtue and discourage vice in the greatest number of men and women. The failure to establish such an environment, especially in the name of gentleness, would be the greater crime.

Khomeini's Attack on Enlightenment Rationalism

Khomeini's conception of education is equally shocking to liberal minds. His dismissal of the entire Enlightenment project verges on absolute. “Learning has had entirely negative effects on our souls,” he contends, explaining that modern science—far from increasing our knowledge of the most important things—in fact erects “a dark veil, an obstacle in the path of man preventing him from attaining that goal for the sake of which all the prophets came.”⁹²⁹ He condemns the Western university, (once) the great bastion of Enlightenment rationalism, as particularly pernicious among imperial inventions. For the intellectually vain especially, reason closes the soul to the very influences that can improve it. Khomeini thus echoes Rousseau's surface argument in the *First Discourse*: the political

⁹²⁸ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 35.

⁹²⁹ Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini, “Third Lecture on *Surat Al-Fatiha*: Veils of Darkness, Veils of Light,” in Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution I*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 396.

community cannot permit—let alone encourage—unrestrained rational inquiry and expect to remain morally upright.

The over-cultivation of man's rational capacity—and the supposition that human reason is sufficient to guide life and politics—is ruinous for two reasons. First, it inclines men to presume that the realm of knowledge is restricted to what can be discovered by rational investigation of nature's laws (that is, it promotes a materialistic understanding of the world and, therefore, an overly narrow epistemology). As Tocqueville well understood, a theoretical materialist—sure that his soul or “psyche” is annihilated with his last breath—will inevitably be a practical hedonist, dedicated to maximizing pleasure or “utility” on earth, however he defines those terms. Khomeini repeats the saying “Knowledge is the thickest of veils” because the Enlightenment conception of learning “causes man to be preoccupied with rational... concepts” and, thus, to self-confidently reject out of hand the possibility that revelation might also yield important truths.⁹³⁰ Second, scientific learning almost ineluctably promotes a kind of intellectual vanity or arrogance that closes a man's mind to modes of inquiry (and entire subject areas) other than the ones he pursues personally; the scholar arrogantly imagines “that the knowledge he has achieved rationally represents everything,” thereby closing in him an honest or open disposition toward other kinds of learning, in particular, revealed truths.⁹³¹ It is learning, therefore, that closes minds—and worse, hearts—creating a deficiency of soul that amounts to an insurmountable obstacle in the way of faith. That modern scholars are peculiarly

⁹³⁰ Khomeini, “Third Lecture on *Surat Al-Fatiha*: Veils of Darkness, Veils of Light,” 396.

⁹³¹ Khomeini, “Third Lecture on *Surat Al-Fatiha*: Veils of Darkness, Veils of Light,” 394.

susceptible to this problem is demonstrated by the more or less ubiquitous assumption that there is only one road to certain knowledge today: the extraction of nature's secrets by torture, that is, by the modern scientific method and its devotion to controlled experimentation and data collection. In areas of study that do not conduce to the methods of the natural sciences, we doubt the possibility of certain knowledge altogether. In this allegedly subjective realm of "values," knowledge is at best probabilistic. Needless to say, this assumption is an obstacle to the species of moral certitude and firm religious commitment Khomeini believes to be essential to the establishment of a well-ordered political community.

For Khomeini, the existence of modern scholars in Iran is only a part, a small part, of the problem. Had they kept to themselves, they would have been useless as members of an Islamic state, but not particularly pernicious to the political health of the regime. Their activity as teachers is the more serious problem on Khomeini's account. By sharing their basic epistemological assumptions and methods with their students, scholars who embrace enlightenment rationalism—not just university professors, but so too, the primary and secondary teachers whom they educated—corrupt Iran's youth, leading them from the right path and establishing in hearts and minds barriers in the way of submission to Islam and the state. Thus, Khomeini's urgent complaint:

So, to repeat, we demand fundamental changes in our university system so that the universities come to serve the nation and its needs instead of serving foreigners. Many of our schoolteachers and university professors

are now effectively serving the West by brainwashing and miseducating our youth.⁹³²

Following the Revolution, one of Khomeini's first acts was to close Iran's universities. Reforming them took three years. Khomeini did it because he understood the political importance of ideas, as well as the universities' preeminent role in determining the intellectual tenor of a place; he realized, unlike many in the West, that all roads lead back to the university. To allow the infiltration of Enlightenment rationalism was inevitably to erode "Islamic morality" and make impossible the endurance of an "Islamic culture" in Iran. Khomeini goes so far as to accuse the universities, as reformed by the Shah, of causing a "gravitation of one part of our young people... toward the West."⁹³³ Khomeini recognized that the proliferation of Western ideas about knowing and knowledge represented perhaps the gravest threat to the possibility of an Islamic state built on a ubiquitous submission to Islam's revealed laws. Thus, he sought to transform Iran's universities and to buttress the institutions that would help perpetuate an "Islamic culture," in particular, the *ulema*.

Khomeini's criticism of modern science, nonetheless, stops short of being unqualified; out of ordinary political necessity, he has little choice but to make a place for "formal learning" in an Islamic state. To avoid the dangers of enlightenment rationalism, however, "the universities... must change fundamentally." He cannot argue that they must be transformed into traditional *madrassas*—schools devoted entirely to the study of

⁹³² Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini, "The Meaning of the Cultural Revolution" (April 26, 1980, Address), in Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution I*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 296.

⁹³³ Khomeini, "The Meaning of the Cultural Revolution," 299.

Islamic theology and law⁹³⁴—but they must see to it that students’ hearts are purified by a parallel “Islamic education,” one designed to impart an “Islamic morality.” A proper moral education is essential to help guide students’ pursuit of the rational sciences in such a way as to render the learning profitable, both personally and politically. As Khomeini explained shortly after the Revolution in an address concerning his reorganization of higher education in Iran, “the universities must become Islamic in the sense that the subjects studied in them are to be pursued in accordance with the needs of the nation and for the sake of strengthening it.”⁹³⁵

Students should come to conceive of the hard sciences not as theoretical, but as practical in nature—not as the way to truths about man, nature, and the universe, but as tools to be employed in service to higher ends determined by God. Reason is, thus, the handmaiden of revelation; “philosophy itself is a means, not an end.”⁹³⁶ Avicenna, whom Khomeini admires, is likened to a blind man with a stick. Reason is the stick: a useful tool, but “narrow” in its scope, and on its own, terribly insufficient.⁹³⁷ The philosopher can apprehend important truths by the activity of his unaided intellect; Khomeini gives “divine unity” and “absolute perfection” as examples of the kind of fruit rational inquiry can bear.⁹³⁸ But the philosopher cannot attach substance of real consequence for human

⁹³⁴ Khomeini, “The Meaning of the Cultural Revolution,” 298.

⁹³⁵ Khomeini, “The Meaning of the Cultural Revolution,” 298.

⁹³⁶ Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini, “First Lecture on Surat al-Fatiha: Everything is a Name of God,” in Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution I*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 376.

⁹³⁷ Khomeini, “First Lecture on Surat al-Fatiha: Everything is a Name of God,” 376. C.f. Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini, “Fourth Lecture on Surat al-Fatiha: He is the Outward and the Inward,” in Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution I*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 408.

⁹³⁸ Khomeini, “Fourth Lecture on Surat al-Fatiha: He is the Outward and the Inward,” 408.

life to those barren theoretical insights. At best, philosophy prepares the heart to appreciate the truths of revelation, perhaps in a more honest or thorough way:

One who has reached a rational perception of the truth by means of proof and argument must gradually inculcate in to the heart, spelling it, as it were, letter by letter and constantly repeating it... When the fruit of rational perception is conveyed to the heart through constant effort and repetition, the heart begins to read the Koran itself and to learn the truths contained in it.”⁹³⁹

Building fully Islamic Personalities

Khomeini recognizes and insists that Islamizing society is the first prerequisite of Islamic government. He agrees with his Sunni counterparts in the emphasis he places on proselytizing, especially when political activity is impossible. Unlike Sunni thinkers, however, the scholars as a class are absolutely indispensable in this respect; for Khomeini, it is their most important “duty” to “disseminate[] the knowledge of Islam” and to “convey... the ordinances of Islam” as widely as possible.⁹⁴⁰ He agrees with Qutb on the further point too: Islam is a universal religion meant “for all people in the world.”⁹⁴¹ As he explains the duty in *Islamic Government*,

You must teach people matters relating to worship, of course, but more important are the political, economic, and legal aspects of Islam. These are, or should be, the focus of our concern. It is our duty to begin exerting ourselves now in order to establish a truly Islamic government. We must propagate our cause to the people, instruct them in it, and convince them of its validity. We must generate a wave of intellectual awakening, to emerge as a current throughout society, and gradually to take shape as an

⁹³⁹ Khomeini, “Fourth Lecture on Surat al-Fatiha: He is the Outward and the Inward,” 409.

⁹⁴⁰ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 69.

⁹⁴¹ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 69-70.

organized Islamic movement made up of the awakened, committed, and religious masses who will rise up and establish Islamic government.

Propagation and instruction, then, are our two fundamental and most important activities. It is the duty of the *fugaha* to promulgate religion and instruct the people in the creed, ordinances, and institutions of Islam, in order to pave the way in society for the implementation of Islamic law and the establishment of Islamic institutions.⁹⁴²

Political reform—and the success of any political regime—depends on the antecedent, and more or less ubiquitous, internalization of sacred *mores* and commitments: “The mainstay of any government must be its people; if it lacks the support of its people, it cannot be a true government or enjoy stability and permanence.”⁹⁴³ Thus, proselytizing efforts come first. To put it in a few words that encapsulate union of church and state: “popular devotion to Islam” must become the government’s “main source of support.”⁹⁴⁴ Where political revolution is impossible, moreover, spreading the faith, “propagating activity,” remains both a possibility and a duty. It is possible no matter the political environment (as the Brotherhood discovered in Iraq) and it is the requisite preparation for the later establishment of Islamic government, when circumstances permit. This is, indeed, Khomeini’s advice to Muslim students in North America: “With utter devotion, exert yourselves to diffuse and propagate Islam among non-Muslims... Devote greater attention to planning the foundations of an Islamic state and studying the problems involved...”⁹⁴⁵

⁹⁴² Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 127.

⁹⁴³ Khomeini, “The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt” (January 2, 1980 interview), 338.

⁹⁴⁴ Khomeini, “The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt” (January 2, 1980 interview), 338.

⁹⁴⁵ Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini, “Message to the Muslim Students in North America,” in Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution I*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 210-211.

The overwhelming emphasis on proselytizing efforts very likely accounts for Khomeini's "populist" tone and "propaganda style."⁹⁴⁶ Unlike many of his contemporaries—notably those in Iraq who were quiet while Saddam Hussein ruled (though not so quiet while the Constitution was being drafted)—Khomeini does not write in the ordinary careful and restrained manner characteristic of a jurist or theologian. His speeches, and even *Islamic Government* (his most widely read work and the one which circulated extensively in the decade leading up to the Iranian Revolution) are rhetorically charged in a calculated effort to exert maximum political effect. He embraces such an obviously political role because he believed the religious scholars constituted the only institution that could present "a great barrier to foreign domination" and bring about the Islamic revolution he advocated.⁹⁴⁷ "It is the duty of Islam scholars," Khomeini writes, "to put an end to this [the Shah's] system of oppression... and form an Islamic government."⁹⁴⁸ As we have noted already, Khomeini believes that absent state support for religion, public religiosity will inevitably atrophy, and that it is sufficient to destroy the clerical class to achieve this result.

At the conclusion of his long list of the spheres *sharia* properly regulates, Khomeini explains that the political community he envisions will produce, by the totality of its influences, more or less unthinking beings, all of them living according to the laws and behavioral expectations conducive to virtue.

⁹⁴⁶ Michael Fischer, "Imam Khomeini: Four Levels of Understanding," in John Esposito, ed. *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 162.

⁹⁴⁷ Khomeini, "The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt" (January 2, 1980 interview), 339.

⁹⁴⁸ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 151.

Islam provides laws and instructions for all of these matters, aiming, as it does, to produce integrated and virtuous human beings who are walking embodiments of the law... It is obvious, then, how much care Islam devotes to government and the political and economic relations of society, with the goal of creating conditions conducive to the production of morally upright and virtuous human beings.⁹⁴⁹

Coercive use of the state's power to spread belief and extract obedience should, it follows, become less and less necessary as commitments to the tenets of his potent brand of Islam are strengthened and as the people employ the tremendous power of opinion to shape behavior.

No less than for the Sunni Islamists, on Khomeini's account, the essential tenets of modern liberalism are upended entirely. There is no private sphere, no protection for freedoms and rights legitimized by the laws of nature and nature's God, no presumption of the individual's intellectual and moral sufficiency as autonomous agent. Whereas the dignity of the individual is a core commitment of citizenries in the Western world—one of those sacred opinions more or less internalized with the air—for Khomeini, “everything is God's,” “man has nothing in and of himself.”⁹⁵⁰ In other places, he cites the Qur'an directly, contending that the demands of God must always trump the desires, inclinations, and intentions of individuals: “the Prophet has higher claims on the believers than their own selves (33:6).”⁹⁵¹ Nor can any human achievement be attributed to mortal talent, intellect, or ability. God created mankind and “Created things are nothing; if the divine

⁹⁴⁹ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 44.

⁹⁵⁰ Khomeini, “First Lecture on Surat al-Fatiha: Everything is a Name of God,” 375.

⁹⁵¹ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 65.

manifestation is taken away from them, nothing of them remains...”⁹⁵² This notion, which Khomeini emphasizes, is poisonous to individual initiative and personal responsibility.⁹⁵³ A teaching that denies man’s capacity to affect the world, or even to make important decisions for oneself, saps mankind of its creative and intellectual energy in proportion to the idea’s hold over the minds of men and women. Far from teaching that the individual is capable of determining for him or herself a worthy plan of living, and therefore entitled and equipped to participate meaningfully in the collective self government of his or her community, submission of will and intellect are positive excellences on the Islamist view.

Khomeini’s Criticism of the United States

While Khomeini criticizes Western imperialist meddling in the Islamic world, the pernicious cultural effects of Western ideas are, by far, his most urgent complaint. The combination of easygoing indulgence on a grand scale (made possible by the West’s economic prowess) and its dazzling technological achievements make the Western way of life incredibly seductive. That Iranians, especially young Iranians, instinctively found Western habits and assumptions so attractive led Khomeini to fear that Islamic civilization was collapsing from within. This explains his fierce antipathy to Western music: Rock & Roll’s appeal is to the lowest in man, which it moves and gratifies without

⁹⁵² Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini, “Second Lecture on Surat al-Fatiha: Migrating to God and His Messenger,” in Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution I*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 380.

⁹⁵³ Khomeini, “Second Lecture on Surat al-Fatiha: Migrating to God and His Messenger,” 380.

demanding any effort on the part of the individual. Khomeini well appreciates the addictive appeal and tremendous power of our easy and self-indulgent way of life, and understood its capacity to induce Iranians to leave Islam, just as Westerners progressively abandoned fidelity to assertive and demanding modes of practicing Christianity. In spite of its brilliance, Khomeini insists the West cannot offer a worthy or redeeming way of living—neither virtue and salvation for the individual, nor a solution to the community’s “social problems” and the “relief of human misery” on earth.⁹⁵⁴ Moreover, the affluence and permissiveness of life in America and Europe contributes to an emerging weakness of Western civilization: as a consequence of “material progress,” Westerners “lost all self-confidence and imagined that the only way to achieve technical progress was to abandon their own laws and beliefs.”⁹⁵⁵ Khomeini believes that Islam provides the beliefs and the laws that relieve misery, promote individual happiness, and lead to salvation. Their promise, however, was being obscured—even for Muslims—by the seductive glitz of the postmodern West, especially the United States, which Khomeini famously labeled the “Great Satan.”

Satan, for Khomeini, exists in everyone in the form of man’s unredeemed soul. Satan rules when man gives into his “vain desires” which are “a manifestation of him [Satan].” For Khomeini, the great task for every human being is the same: “We must destroy the government of Satan [vain desires] within us.”⁹⁵⁶ Islamic government constitutes the great earthly support for man’s achievement of his proper struggle. As another scholar

⁹⁵⁴ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 36.

⁹⁵⁵ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 35.

⁹⁵⁶ Khomeini, “Second Lecture on Surat al-Fatiha: Migrating to God and His Messenger,” 385.

has pointed out, Khomeini emphatically agrees with Qutb and al-Banna on this point: they all “saw the liberation and self-assertion of the inward soul as being realized through contact with God.”⁹⁵⁷ For Satan to win, it suffices that men cease their struggle against appetite and passion, an outcome that would be assured if they came to forget the exacting commands of Islam. Thus, in a lecture entitled “The Struggle Against the Appetitive Soul, or the Supreme Jihad,” Khomeini puts it this way: “it is said that all the efforts of Satan are devoted to this one goal: all his wiles and exertions, by day and by nights, have as their purpose to snatch away men’s faith.”⁹⁵⁸

The West does not stand for liberty on this view, but rather, for the proud rejection of man’s great task: winning the struggle within. To celebrate liberty as we seem to understand the term today—according to which men and women are properly free to define happiness for themselves and pursue that definition within a very generous sphere protected by law—is, in almost every case (given the disappointing nature of man), equivalent to celebrating the conscious decision to live life enslaved to the ferocious and alternating demands of passion, desire, and vanity as they compete for the individual’s attention. Khomeini calls the United States the “Great Satan” because, on his view, liberal democracy’s guiding ideals constitute nothing less than the most dangerous political teaching that has ever entered the human mind: the right to indulge the appetitive soul free of interference, to pamper and feed the manifestation of Satan in us, is championed as the central *and unalienable* right legitimate government exists to protect!

⁹⁵⁷ Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 141.

⁹⁵⁸ Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini, “The Struggle Against the Appetitive Soul, or the Supreme Jihad,” in Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution I*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 357.

To teach that, according to Nature and Nature's God, man has an unalienable right to behave as he pleases—a *right to selfishness and self-centeredness*—is a powerful justification to neglect, to abdicate, even utterly to ignore the hard struggle that should define human life, and to the support of which, temporal politics is properly devoted. Indeed, liberalism's founding ideals (as they are widely understood today) purport to be high principles that justify and legitimate a way of life utterly incompatible with, *and immeasurably more pleasant than*, the way of life Islam demands. Thus, Khomeini posits an antithesis between indulgence and religiosity and warns that when "love of the world and self-love begin to increase... Satan is able to take away your faith."⁹⁵⁹ America—for the scholar, no more than a great monument to sexual licentiousness and conspicuous consumption—has an unambiguously pernicious impact in the world, eroding the pull of everything good and noble in man by its glorification of the freedom to indulge the selfish passions on an almost unlimited scale. It does not help Khomeini that the West's intellectual commitments have been so obviously successful as measured by their worldly fruit. That our materialistic natural science had yielded unrivaled technical superiority, and our value-neutral science of politics and economics, unrivaled economic superiority, cannot fail to raise the possibility in many minds—both among the theoretically inclined and laymen—that Western civilization is right in all its intellectual commitments.

Because Western ideas are so dangerous, Khomeini demonized the United States and taught that Muslims are duty-bound to struggle against the corruption and tyranny the country represents, a teaching that the Iranian regime continues to trumpet. In

⁹⁵⁹ Khomeini, "The Struggle Against the Appetitive Soul, or the Supreme Jihad," 357.

marshalling the authority of Islam to this effect, he sought to counteract the appeal of Western ways by rousing spirit against appetite: it is hard to be seduced by something one hates in the name of moral commitments one believes to be of incomparably higher dignity. By portraying the United States and the way of life for which it stands in such hyperbolic terms—as a threat to Islam itself—those committed to Islam can be inoculated against the charms of the West, their allegiance welded to Islam’s ostensible champion, in this case, the Iranian regime. This, incidentally, explains Iran’s rhetorical bellicosity and its flagrantly provocative behavior on the international scene: threats made, sanctions enforced, and military action taken by the can be portrayed by Iran’s leaders as assaults on Islam. Western bellicosity serves to strengthen the Iranian regime by rallying Iranians around a state that masquerades as Islam’s great champion in a world order presented as implacably hostile to it.

Islam purportedly mandates as much. Citing the example of Islam’s Prophet again, Khomeini insists Muslims have a duty struggle—violently—against America and the West. Indeed, justice *requires* destroying communities (both internal and external) “whose existence” is “harmful for Islam.” It bears considering this shocking passage from *Islamic Government* at some length:

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him) is the foremost example of the just ruler. When he gave orders for the conquest of a certain area, the burning of a certain place, or the destruction of a certain group whose existence was harmful for Islam, the Muslims, and mankind in general, his orders were just. If he had not given orders such as these, it would have been the opposite for justice, because it would have meant neglecting the welfare of Islam, the Muslims, and human society.⁹⁶⁰

⁹⁶⁰ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 89.

Similarly, Khomeini explains that Muhammad's successor, Abu Bakr, turned to violence in the name of Islam: "the Commander of the Faithful was also a man who would draw his sword when it was necessary—to destroy the workers of corruption—with all the strength he could muster. This is the true meaning of justice."⁹⁶¹ Yes, on Khomeini's understanding, justice positively requires the destruction of the forces that might undermine or otherwise interfere with ("corrupt") the extreme interpretation of Islamic law he sought to disseminate. In the terms of modern liberalism: there are no protections for minorities or for heterodox opinions. They must be rooted out. In Khomeini's words, "Islam is prepared to subordinate individuals to the collective interest of society and has rooted out numerous groups that were a source of corruption and hard to human society."⁹⁶² It is hard to imagine a teaching more shocking to contemporary Western minds: cleansing the community of pernicious heterodox opinions is a positive necessity, and the elimination of diversity, the very precondition of establishing a just political regime.

Khomeini's insistence that Islam countenances violence is ubiquitous. His rationale, here again, echoes Qutb, this time, the latter's distinctive *jahiliyya* teaching. The present state of affairs in the Middle East, especially the prevailing state of mind, constitutes an impediment to the spread of more literal interpretations of Islam; thus, in much the same way Muhammad resorted to force to unify the Arabian Peninsula, so force will be a necessary component of the spread of Islam in contemporary times. Removing what

⁹⁶¹ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 89.

⁹⁶² Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 89.

stands in the way of the establishment of Islamic government, namely the tyranny and corruption associated with the West, is the first step toward this laudable end, and it can only be achieved by violence (“it is our duty to remove from the life of Muslim society all traces of *kufir* and destroy them”).⁹⁶³ Khomeini’s teaching bears such close resemblance to Qutb’s on this question that in an interview he gave after the Revolution, ten years after the appearance of *Islamic Government*, he invoked the term “jahiliyya” in exactly the way the Egyptian popularized: to describe the intolerable situation Iranians faced under the Shah, and Shiite Iraqis, under Saddam Hussein’s brutal Ba’ath party dictatorship.⁹⁶⁴ Readers will recall that this aspect of Qutb’s thought is responsible for inspiring the *jihadist* strains of Sunni radicalism in modern times.

There is a connection, moreover, between the inner struggle that defines human life, and the struggle to spread Islam. Those who have successfully overcome their own desires and passions—who have “waged a *jihad* against their selves”—are to become holy warriors dedicated to spreading the faith further: “without the inner *jihad*, the outer *jihad* is impossible.”⁹⁶⁵ Khomeini insists Islam mandates as much. Consider another remarkable passage from *Islamic Government*:

If you present Islam accurately and acquaint people with its world-view, doctrines, principles, ordinances, and social system, they will welcome it ardently... So, courageous sons of Islam, stand up! Address the people bravely; tell the truth about our situation to the masses in simple language; arouse them to enthusiastic activity, and turn the people in the street and

⁹⁶³ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 48.

⁹⁶⁴ Khomeini, “The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt” (January 2, 1980 interview), 333.

⁹⁶⁵ Khomeini, “Second Lecture on Surat al-Fatiha: Migrating to God and His Messenger,” 387. C.f. Khomeini, “Fourth Lecture on Surat al-Fatiha: He is the Outward and the Inward,” 400-401.

the bazaar, our simple-hearted workers and peasants, and our alert students into dedicated *mujahids*. The entire population will become *mujahids*. All segments of society are ready to struggle for the sake of freedom, independence, and the happiness of the nation, and their struggle needs religion. Give the people Islam, then, for Islam is the school of *jihad*, the religion of struggle; let them amend their characters and beliefs in accordance with Islam and transform themselves into a powerful force, so that they may overthrow the tyrannical regime imperialism has imposed on us and set up an Islamic government.⁹⁶⁶

In his speeches, Khomeini went so far, in fact, as to claim that those who casually observe tenets of Islamic law, but who do not participate in its struggles (for instance, against the Shah) are not, in fact, Muslims. Islam is an active religion. Citing the example of the Prophet, the cleric claims that Muslims are obligated to fight, that “the true Muslim... clenches his fist... If a Muslim shows no concern for the affairs of his fellow Muslims, he is not a Muslim.”⁹⁶⁷ It is not enough to identify oneself as a believer (as a Christian would in the West on the assumption that faith is properly a personal matter); to be a Muslim on Khomeini’s account requires total submission to demanding religious edicts, even the shedding of blood in the name of religious command under some circumstances. Conquest—Khomeini makes clear—is likewise for the sake of spreading Islam; unlike the imperialists, Muslims do not capture lands for their resources but for a much higher reason: to convert the inhabitants, “to make men into true human beings,” just as the rightly guided Caliphs did as they extended the dominion of Islam by the sword.⁹⁶⁸ He insists that the Qur’an and the traditions make this clear beyond any doubt; much as Qutb had inveighed against modernizing apologists who have tried to present a gentle interpretation of Islam, analogizing away doctrinal support for violence, so Khomeini

⁹⁶⁶ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 131-132.

⁹⁶⁷ Khomeini, “In Commemoration of the First Martyrs of the Revolution,” 221.

⁹⁶⁸ Khomeini, “Third Lecture on *Surat Al-Fatiha*: Veils of Darkness, Veils of Light,” 400-401.

dismisses those who claim Islam to be a peaceful religion: only lazy cowards are willing to twist the word of God in order to justify their failure to live up to Islam's noble demands. The traditions revisionists cite are rejected as "two weak *hadiths*" of dubious provenance, probably "forged by court preachers" in service to irreligious ulterior motives.⁹⁶⁹ In this context, too, Khomeini points to modern day Christianity as an exemplification of the fate he means to help Islam avoid. Jesus, he alleges again, could not have intended to teach apathy in the face of unjust government; power-hungry advocates of secularism enervated Christianity to secure their own political position:

Jesus (peace be upon him) was a great prophet... This recommendation to turn the other cheek was invented by those who claim some affiliation to Jesus (we cannot call them Christians); they deceived the Christians and other simpletons and made them completely passive toward their governments.⁹⁷⁰

The Authority of the Scholars

Recognizing, perhaps, that his own political authority (and intimately related to it, the endurance of the brand of Islam he means to solidify) depend on inoculating Muslims against calls for modern reinterpretation of Islamic law, Khomeini places high emphasis on the impropriety of any such interpretative liberty. Unlike his Sunni counterparts, he asserts a radical disjuncture between the status of scholar and worshipper to achieve it; only the scholars can say what sacred texts mean.⁹⁷¹ From this, they derive considerable

⁹⁶⁹ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 71.

⁹⁷⁰ Khomeini, "In Commemoration of the First Martyrs of the Revolution," 225.

⁹⁷¹ Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 138

political authority. In *Islamic Government*, Khomeini explains that the “scholars of the community—the ‘*ulama*’ are the heirs of the Imams in power and authority”;⁹⁷² they are “ruler and judge, and these positions belong to them in perpetuity”;⁹⁷³ he goes so far, in fact, as to assert on the basis of his textual exegesis that “the same rule and governance that has been established for the Most Noble Messenger... is also established for the scholars.”⁹⁷⁴ In an interview after the Revolution, Khomeini restated this position, explaining that it remains the task of the religious elite to “guide the people in all matters.”⁹⁷⁵

To prove the (controversial) contention that worshippers must systematically defer to the scholars, who are of much higher dignity, he invokes a series of traditions (of purportedly unimpeachable provenance), and devotes considerable space to their explication. The following *hadith*, which Khomeini dwells on at particular length, captures his overall point exceptionally well:

The superiority of the learned man over the mere worshipper is like that of the full moon over the stars. Truly the scholars are the heirs of the prophets; the prophets bequeathed not a single dinar or dirham; instead they bequeathed knowledge, and whoever acquires it has indeed acquired a generous portion of their legacy.⁹⁷⁶

On the basis of the Qur’an, too, Khomeini claims for the ‘*ulama*’ almost unlimited power over ordinary believers:

⁹⁷² Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 100.

⁹⁷³ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 98.

⁹⁷⁴ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 103.

⁹⁷⁵ Khomeini, “The Religious Scholars Led the Revolt” (January 2, 1980 interview), 341.

⁹⁷⁶ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 99.

[W]e can infer from the [Qur'anic] verse: 'The prophet has higher claims on the believers than their own selves' (33:6) that the '*ulama* possess the function of governance just as the prophet does... The prophet, then, is empowered to rule and govern over the believers, and the same rule and governance that has been established for the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) is also established for the scholars...'⁹⁷⁷

It follows that novel reinterpretation of Islam's tenets—for political purposes or personal worship—lies well beyond the competency of ordinary worshippers. Insofar as the scholars' most important inheritance from the Prophet is "knowledge derived from God Almighty," their task is not creative in nature, but rather, the guardianship and dissemination of the original meaning.⁹⁷⁸ He preemptively rejects the legitimacy of any interpretive liberty, and he does so cognizant that those seeking to marshal the tremendous authority of religion in service of other, potentially irreligious, ends pose a severe danger to his own political-religious project. To put it bluntly, Khomeini advances an understanding of Islam that will prove resistant to any attempt to reinterpret its tenets in light of humanist principles or a rationalist epistemology; to persuade believers themselves that Islam itself prohibits any such thing would render the community of believers intolerant of any such attempt. Thus, he means to make it impossible for a would-be Spinoza to marshal the authority of Islam in the service of an alternative form of political regime, as Enlightenment thinkers managed in the West to propose a persuasive manner of interpreting the Gospels that supported, even demanded, political liberalism. He raises the subject of precisely such a scheme at the beginning of a televised lecture broadcast shortly after the Shah's overthrow, only to forbid it in forceful terms.

⁹⁷⁷ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 103.

⁹⁷⁸ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 106.

Recently, people have appeared who, without the slightest qualification for interpreting the [Qur'an], try to impose their own objectives and ideas upon both the [Qur'an] and the Sunna... Their real interest is not the [Qur'an] or its interpretation, but trying to convince our young people to accept their objectives under the pretext that they are Islamic. I emphasize, therefore, that those who have not pursued religious studies, young people who are not well grounded in Islamic matters, and all who are uninformed concerning Islam should not attempt to interpret the [Qur'an]. If they do so nevertheless for the sake of their own goals, no one should pay any attention to their interpretations. One of the things that is forbidden in Islam is interpretation of the [Qur'an] according to personal opinion, or attempting to make the [Qur'an] conform to one's own opinions.⁹⁷⁹

By monopolizing interpretative authority on religious grounds, Iran's Shiite scholars mean not only to propose, but to ossify, the radicalized theological and juridical understandings of the Qur'an and the *Sunna* they have advanced, and which subsequently inspired the Iranian Revolution.

Islam and Democracy in Iran

It should not be at all surprising that participatory politics in Iran have not yielded liberal policies of governance. Since the Revolution, Iran has a better record of holding elections than any other state in the Middle East (excepting Turkey and Israel)—proof, once again, that elections do not a liberal democracy make.⁹⁸⁰ Mohsen A. Milani has argued that Iran entered its era of participatory politics at the beginning of the twentieth century. More consequential, however, than the Constitutional Movement (1906-1911) or even the rise of the populist Mohammad Mossadeq (in the years immediately leading

⁹⁷⁹ Khomeini, "First Lecture on Surat al-Fatiha: Everything is a Name of God," 366.

⁹⁸⁰ Mohsen M. Milani, "Political Participation in Revolutionary Iran," in John Esposito, ed., *Political Islam* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers), 92.

up to his overthrow by the CIA in 1953), is the Islamist-led revolution of 1979. The Iranian Revolution, Milani argues, was characterized by a “level of political participation” that was “astonishingly high;”⁹⁸¹ since the Revolution, he continues, “the Islamic revolution has incorporated a relatively large segment of the population into the political process and has succeeded in institutionalizing its popular base of support.”⁹⁸² While he acknowledges that “the framers of the Islamic constitution were certainly not shy about admitting that popular sovereignty is not the foundation of the Islamic Republic,” he also demonstrates that the Islamists “used innovative methods to mobilize the masses,” most of which involved leveraging the authority of Islam for nakedly political purposes.⁹⁸³ Islamist leaders politicized the Shiite tradition of commemorating the dead forty days after their passing, and used the occasion to intensify popular antipathy; they turned public prayers and religious processions into political events intended to mobilize the people against the Shah; and they circulated Ayatollah Khomeini’s inflammatory speeches via cassette tape.⁹⁸⁴

In the years following the Revolution, Khomeini incorporated his supporters into a “ministate” powerful enough to guide the rest of the state, and to transform it, in spite of the Revolution’s ostensible commitment to democratic political institutions. As Milani, Kepel, Taheri and others have explained, Khomeini mobilized those who agreed with his program to further Islamize Iran: the officials of the new government were drawn from the loyal Islamic Republican Party; by March, a referendum on the establishment of an

⁹⁸¹ Milani, “Political Participation in Revolutionary Iran,” 77.

⁹⁸² Milani, “Political Participation in Revolutionary Iran,” 78.

⁹⁸³ Milani, “Political Participation in Revolutionary Iran,” 81.

⁹⁸⁴ Milani, “Political Participation in Revolutionary Iran,” 81.

“Islamic republic”—whatever that meant—had affirmed Khomeini’s program (by a reported 98%-2% margin); supervisory committees (*komitehs*) acted as “vigilante police,” enforcing Islamic values and new laws derived from *sharia* by violent means (including, for example, a law mandating the veil and full Islamic dress);⁹⁸⁵ the revolutionary courts quickly Islamized the justice system; the University of Tehran was closed, purged, and an orthodoxy established in the intellectual sphere;⁹⁸⁶ Khomeini and the (typically younger) Mullahs who shared his belief that Islam is an active religion inundated the radio, television, and mosques with their radical ideas;⁹⁸⁷ powerful Generals were executed almost immediately (at least 70 in all), this in addition to the thousands of officers who were retired or otherwise removed from service;⁹⁸⁸ a loyal Revolutionary Guard was established to supervise the rest of the army with the aim of preempting a military *coup*; and the Pahlavi Foundation (with other wealthy nongovernmental organizations committed to the same ends) were allowed to dominate civil society, creating a kind of link between the people and the government.⁹⁸⁹

The Iran-Iraq war, which broke out the year after the Revolution, necessitated the mobilization of (and permitted the politicization of) large numbers of the rural lower class, while the long and bloody contest with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq simultaneously distracted the population from the government’s utter mismanagement of the economy. No doubt, war with a secular tyrant who was brutally oppressing a majority Shiite population did

⁹⁸⁵ Kepel, *Jihad*, 117.

⁹⁸⁶ Kepel, *Jihad*, 115.

⁹⁸⁷ Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah*, 261.

⁹⁸⁸ Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah*, 249.

⁹⁸⁹ Milani, “Political Participation in Revolutionary Iran,” 84.

more than a little to increase the resonance of Khomeini's brand of political Islam.

Domestically, Khomeini was crushing dissent vigorously, and by 1983 had banned every opposition political party.⁹⁹⁰ Thus, the familiar dynamic that led Spinoza and Locke to depoliticize Christianity reasserted itself again, this time, in the Islamic world: political power, achieved by marshaling the power of religion, is employed to consolidate that authority even at the cost of further radicalizing religion and corrupting politics.

Iran's present constitution, bequeathed by Khomeini, formally separates political authority between a Supreme Guide (a divinely-inspired religious scholar) and a host of religious institutions on the one hand (the Assembly of Experts, the Council of Guardians, and the Expediency Committee), and ostensibly secular elected branches on the other (the president and a parliament). In theory, the elected branches are separate authorities and to considerable extent independent of the clerical bodies. In practice, however, the religious authorities supervise everything: candidates for political office, the elections themselves, the judicial system, proposed legislation in draft form, the bureaucracy, the media, the education system, the powerful security apparatus, etc.⁹⁹¹ The constitutional arrangement was deliberately crafted in such a way as to permit widespread political participation, but only so far as democratic institutions and practices would yield results compatible with the Revolution's domineering brand of Islam. As Milani sums up, "According to the majority of the framers of the Islamic constitution in 1979, Islam and absolute popular sovereignty are incompatible. They believed that people are free to

⁹⁹⁰ Milani, "Political Participation in Revolutionary Iran," 85.

⁹⁹¹ Palmer, *The Middle East*, 284-285.

determine their own destiny provided they do not violate the Islamic laws...”⁹⁹² In the end, then, Iran’s democratic institutions and the possibility of limited political participation amount to little more than a vent for people who are, from the perspective of the Revolution’s ideology, irredeemably disappointing. For the sake of their own virtue and improvement, the people are believed to require the constant guidance of a religious elite—an elite that is armed with the full coercive and cajoling capacity of a modern state, and which supervises, at the same time, its legislative and judicial branches.

Abdolkarim Soroush and a Proposal for an Islamic Reformation

Hossein Dabbagh, writing under the name Abdolkarim Soroush, is Shiite Islam’s leading reformer. Soroush was born in Tehran, but, like many of the most important modernizing voices in the Islamic world, he studied in the West, in his case, analytic chemistry, history, and the philosophy of science in England. He credits his Western education for enabling him to straddle Islam and modernity, what he believes to be prerequisite to the creation of a kind of “hybrid” intellectual capable of reconciling Islam with the modern world.⁹⁹³ (Intellectuals who are a product of the “narrow and rigid” traditional education system tend not to be creative thinkers.)⁹⁹⁴ For Soroush, the modern Muslim intellectual rethinks the premises and claims of both modernity and Islam, with the aim of identifying Islamic solutions to the problems presented by

⁹⁹² Mohsen M. Milani, “Political Participation in Revolutionary Iran,” 91.

⁹⁹³ Farish A. Noor, “The Responsibilities of the Muslim Intellectual in the 21st Century,” An interview with Abdolkarim Soroush, 8 December, 2003.

⁹⁹⁴ Noor, “The Responsibilities of the Muslim Intellectual in the 21st Century.”

modernity. By his writings and public lectures, he aims to lay down a theoretical basis for an Islamic democracy that is both liberal and morally upright.

Tasked with helping to reshape the Iranian university, he returned to Iran in 1980 at the request of Ayatollah Khomeini himself. His enthusiasm for the Revolution was quickly disappointed, however, as it became increasingly clear Khomeini was not interested in a regime in which a modernized or liberalized Islam enlivens the laws. Nothing could be further from Khomeini's condemnation of the modern university than Soroush's enthusiasm for Western science and his commitment to see Islamic practice reformed in light of intellectual advances in other branches of learning. Soroush resigned after three years and has since proven, from the Revolution's point of view, an accidental *enfant terrible*. He is the most influential advocate for political reform in Iran. He criticizes the clerical political class in severe terms, and by his focus on human rights, freedom, and the dignity of the individual, it is clear that *liberal* democracy is his preferred regime type. He has stated that Islam and democracy are compatible; but he believes the dominant interpretation of Islam must first change in fundamental respects. Unsurprisingly, his willingness to identify in politicized Islam—and to attribute to clerical political interference, in particular—the most important obstacles to constitutional democracy present today in the Islamic world have made him a highly controversial figure. He was tolerated for a time, his writings subjected to regular censorship. By 1995, however, the regime had revoked his journal's publishing license entirely and forbade him from giving public lectures. (It had, by this point, already become difficult for Soroush to speak publicly in Iran on account of his many vociferous opponents, many of them young

students, who regularly interrupted his lectures, at times violently.) The regime ultimately passed a law that imposed severe penalties on Iranians who associate with enemies of the Islamic Republic, a measure many believed targeted Soroush specifically.⁹⁹⁵ A short time later, he left Iran and has since lived in the United States where he has taught at prestigious universities including Princeton, Yale and Harvard, where he is currently visiting faculty.⁹⁹⁶ His intellectual contributions are regularly celebrated in the West. Most recently, *Foreign Policy* identified Soroush as one of the thinkers to whom it would do the world the most good to listen. By his frequent interviews, his Persian-language website, and audio recordings of his arguments widely circulated in Iran today, he clearly intends to have a meaningful impact.⁹⁹⁷

Commentators have gone to far as to call Soroush “the Luther of Islam” and “the Iranian Martin Luther.” While the analogy is imperfect—Soroush’s approach is indeed very different (as detailed in what follows)—it is nonetheless indisputable that he is animated, in large part, by an anticlerical bent and that his aim is to depoliticize and personalize Shiites’ conception of the proper Islamic practice. Most important for present purposes, Soroush rejects key elements of the regime’s ossified theology and jurisprudence outright, what amounts to an implicit, but unmistakable, questioning of “the very foundation of the Islamic Republic.”⁹⁹⁸ He denies that religious scholars constitute the ultimate

⁹⁹⁵ Robin Wright, “Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two Visions of Reformation,” *Journal of Democracy*, 7:2 (1996), 65-75. Also, Valla Vakil, “Debating Religion and Politics in Iran: The Political Thought of Abdolkarim Soroush,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, January, 1997.

⁹⁹⁶ <http://www.dr.soroush.com/Biography-E.htm>

⁹⁹⁷ Abdolkarim Soroush, “Reason and Freedom in Islamic Thought,” in *Muslim Voices on Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Albert Shanker Institute), 10.

⁹⁹⁸ Mohsen M. Milani, “Political Participation in Revolutionary Iran,” 90.

interpretation authority and goes so far, in fact, as to blame the Iranian clerical class for corrupting both politics and religion. He advocates the humanist reinterpretation of sacred texts in light of the exigencies of modernity and the contributions of modern science and Western philosophy. On his interpretation, the public and political aspects of Islam and its laws are deemphasized, and the individual spiritual component of religiosity, asserted. Moreover, he asserts the possibility that *truths* can be derived from sources other than revelation, and that extra-religious truths have an important role to play in guiding political and moral life in the Muslim world.

The Contraction and Expansion of Religious Knowledge

The cornerstone of Soroush's entire system of thought is his theory of "the contraction and expansion of religion understanding," which he calls "first and foremost, a theological theory."⁹⁹⁹ He posits a distinction between religion—which is revealed, unchanging, and perfect—and what he calls "religious knowledge," that is, the prevailing understanding of revealed texts in a given place and time. As Soroush puts it, "It is up to God to reveal a religion, but up to us to understand and realize it."¹⁰⁰⁰ Since human beings—including the scholars who claim interpretative priority—are inherently defective, religious knowledge is inevitably "replete with error, conjecture, and conviction."¹⁰⁰¹ Islam itself is inerrant and perfect ("religion has no defect or flaw"); every human

⁹⁹⁹ Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, trans. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 38.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 31.

¹⁰⁰¹ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 34.

understanding of Islam's revealed teachings, in contrast, cannot but be bound by the inevitable errors introduced by man's inadequate capacities of apprehension and evaluation ("defects abound in exegeses").¹⁰⁰² Soroush explains the distinction between religion and religious knowledge this way:

Yes, it is true that sacred scriptures are (in the judgment of followers) flawless; however, it is just as true that human beings' understanding of religion is flawed. Religion is sacred and heavenly, but the understanding of religion is human and earthly. That which remains constant is religion; that which undergoes change is religious knowledge and insight.¹⁰⁰³

His goal is to "explicate the process through which religion is understood and the manner in which this understanding undergoes change."¹⁰⁰⁴ According to his theory, various extra-religious factors, no less than the personal deficiencies of those professing to be authoritative interpreters, are responsible for the now- or then-prevalent interpretation. As Shireen Hunter helpfully observes, for Soroush, "the greatest part of what is understood as religion is of the 'contingent' type and as such is not the main goal of the Prophetic mission... [T]he contingent aspects of religion are those aspects that could have been different from what they are now, including language, social and cultural contexts, and legal aspects."¹⁰⁰⁵ Soroush's theory is, thus, entirely historicist in its assumptions: the character of what he calls "religious knowledge" in a given time and place is inevitably a consequence of the prevailing assumptions, pressures, and cultural/intellectual influences of the time. Khomeini's revolutionary brand of Islam is, on this account, but a part (if a

¹⁰⁰² Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 31.

¹⁰⁰³ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 31.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 34.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Shireen Hunter, "Islamic Reformist Discourse in Iran," *Reformist Voices in Islam* (New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2009), 79.

large part) of one branch of learning as temporarily constituted. The whole of religious knowledge, similarly, is but one “branch of knowledge” among many other secular branches, “no less, no more.”¹⁰⁰⁶ The Qur’an, from which religious knowledge is purportedly derived, is a text and “does not stand alone, it does not carry its own meaning on its own shoulders.” Even Islam’s sacred texts must be “situated in a context;” they, too, are “theory-laden,” their interpretations “in flux”—all according to a concatenation of ideas, assumptions and pressures, many of them extra-religious, that are but constructs of the particular place and time.¹⁰⁰⁷

Soroush is, thus, making an argument that tracks Spinoza’s in its intention: he claims that virtually all “religious knowledge” can be questioned by individual believers, especially in its theoretical claims. Where Spinoza achieved this by purporting to marshal the authority of the New Testament in support of his irreverent propositions that the prophets were of disappointing mental cast, and, therefore, unable to accurately relay the revelations they received; that the miracles they relayed as signs of revelations’ truth are really but meandering imaginings of weak minds incapable of grasping nature’s true order; and that nature itself is entirely governed by natural laws that are identical to God’s will; Soroush aims to have the same practical effect by parachuting into the Islamic world a strange admixture of modern and post-modern thought.

The lynchpin of his entire effort is the suggestion that religious knowledge is innately flexible. Needless to say, he runs afoul of the Islamist understanding, which emphasizes

¹⁰⁰⁶ Abdolkarim Soroush, “The Evolution and Devolution of Religious Knowledge” in Charles Kurzman, ed., *Liberal Islam*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 245.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Soroush, “The Evolution and Devolution of Religious Knowledge,” 245.

submission of mind to literal interpretations of Islamic law (which, with appropriate expert guidance, are presumed to be authoritative representations of God's will). On Khomeini's understanding, there is no other way to knowledge properly so-called, and therefore, the other branches of learning are of dramatically inferior dignity. The idea that extra-religious learning should influence religious interpretation is beyond blasphemous; Khomeini vehemently proscribed all such endeavors, and professed to marshal the authority of Islam itself to that effect. It is worth considering how far Soroush pushes his heterodox line of argument:

We are but a step away from acknowledging that the temporal nature of religious knowledge, a universally applicable precept, has no other meaning than the synchronization and adaptation of this branch of human knowledge with the sciences and needs of each age. A transformation in the mode of knowledge and life of humanity is the remote cause of a transformation of religious knowledge.¹⁰⁰⁸

Thus, reinterpretation of the tenets of Islam—even in light of the other branches of learning—is inevitable, permissible *and even commendable*: “To treat religious knowledge, a branch of human knowledge, as incomplete, impure, insufficient, and culture-bound; to try to mend and darn its wears and tears is, in itself, an admirable and hallowed undertaking.”¹⁰⁰⁹ As he explained to Mahmoud Sadri after the publication of *The Contraction and Expansion of Religious Knowledge*, his entire theory is inspired by Quine's work in the philosophy of science, which seems to be a kind of historicist holism. On the one hand, “truths everywhere are compatible... One truth in one corner of the world has to

¹⁰⁰⁸ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 32.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 32.

be harmonious and compatible with all truths elsewhere, or else it is not a truth.”¹⁰¹⁰ And yet, on the other hand, the various disciplines—philosophy, physics, theology, etc.—pursue, perpetually and more or less haphazardly, little truthlets in quasi-isolation of the others. Though each is guided by, and restrained by, discipline-specific forces and prejudices in a kind of blind Kuhnian meandering forward (Soroush acknowledges a debt to Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*) entire families of theories emerge as a result, many of them straddling more than one branch of learning. On this basis, Soroush advocates a transformation of religious knowledge, one driven and guided by advancements in other spheres of learning. As he explains, “modern theology, by its very nature, is in constant renewal, a process that highlights the relationship of modern theology to other sciences as well...”¹⁰¹¹ Much as the infiltration of modern ideas (for instance, the Stalinist conception of the state as totalitarian in scope and role) contributed to the emergence of political Islam,¹⁰¹² so can ideas borrowed from the West’s liberal tradition—and here, Soroush will emphasize human rights and the dignity of the intellect above all—affect religious knowledge in a way likely to have positive political consequences in Iran and the Muslim world generally. Thus, it is better openly to acknowledge the inherently “temporal nature of religious knowledge” such that the

¹⁰¹⁰ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 21.

¹⁰¹¹ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 16.

¹⁰¹² Nilou Mobasser, trans. “Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power” (An interview with Abdolkarim Soroush), *Iranian Personalities*. Available at: http://www.iranchamber.com/personalities/asoroush/works/intellectuals_powerless_wielders.php

“synchronization and adaptation of this branch of human knowledge with the sciences and needs of each age” be allowed to run its course in the Islamic world.¹⁰¹³

The theory of contraction and expansion Soroush advances thus allows him to claim that Islam as revealed is perfect and unchanging (an important homage to the powerful Islamist contention), and simultaneously, to advocate the transformation or advancement of inherently temporal “religious knowledge” (what, for Soroush, requires reinterpretation guided by extra-religious, liberal and humanist, commitments).¹⁰¹⁴ Unlike Khomeini and the conservative scholarly establishment, he recognizes that the Islamic world cannot operate in a pre-modern vacuum. Modernity—experimental science, modern and post-modern Western thought, the globalized economic system, the state-centered international system, etc.—has created an environment which, of necessity, limits or constrains the manners in which Islam can have productive real-world manifestation.¹⁰¹⁵ Moreover, modernity has transformed human beings—their conception of themselves, their conception of legitimate government, their demands of the political community—in truly decisive ideational respects as well. In Soroush’s words, “modern humankind is profoundly and fundamentally different from its forbears”; as such, traditional manners of organizing the political community cannot but fail to satisfy citizens who harbor, in some respects at least, distinctly modern expectations.¹⁰¹⁶ In another place, he clarifies the crux

¹⁰¹³ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 32.

¹⁰¹⁴ As Soroush explained to Robin Wright, “The essence of religion will always be sacred, but its interpretation by fallible human beings is not sacred—and therefore, it can be criticized, modified, refined, and redefined.” Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows*. (New York: Penguin Press, 1998), 270.

¹⁰¹⁵ Noor, “The Responsibilities of the Muslim Intellectual in the 21st Century.”

¹⁰¹⁶ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 54.

of the difference between the classical and the modern “definition[s] of a human being”: the classical understanding of religion posits a “duty-bearing human being,” and the modern conception, a “right-bearing human being.”¹⁰¹⁷ Where the population has even partially internalized the notion that individuals have rights—if only the right to vote—a traditional legal framework will not be made to prevail easily, or unchallenged, nor will it function entirely as its elite guardians intend. For Soroush (as for Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Spinoza, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Tocqueville, al-Banna, Qutb, Mawdudi, Khomeini, Bennabi, and virtually every political thinker of consequence until the twentieth century), a people’s beliefs, habits, and commitments are of overwhelming importance from the perspective of statecraft.

The Crisis of the Islamic World

Although Soroush does not quite put it this way, he depicts a Muslim world in utter contradiction with itself, one in which the various prevailing branches of learning are in constant tension with one another, and in the end, utterly irreconcilable. In terms of the formal constitutional structure of the state (there is no scriptural basis for an Islamic “Republic”),¹⁰¹⁸ its utilization of modern administrative techniques, the people’s

¹⁰¹⁷ Nilou Mobasser, trans. “Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power,” near the end.

¹⁰¹⁸ As Ali M. Ansari notes in another context, “Iran is both antagonistic toward the West and philosophically intimate with it.” Even the country’s name, the “Islamic Republic of Iran,” expresses this schizophrenia. Republicanism is an eminently Western invention. And yet, even the most oppressive regimes on the face of the planet have sufficiently internalized Western ideas about political legitimacy that they consider themselves compelled to. Ali M. Ansari, “Continuous Change from Within,” *The Washington Quarterly*, 26:4 (Autumn, 2003), 57.

economic expectations, the enthusiastic employment of modern technology, and the embrace of the sciences that sustain these aspects of modern life, Western ideas prevail; but when it comes to the ends of the state and the moral character of political life, Islamists seek to impose a distinctly anti-modern ethic based on traditional notions of man's nature, and the nature of the cosmos and its ruling God. Where Islamists come to control the modern apparatus of the state, you get Iran—an untenable fusion of modern means, a semi-modern people, and a government devoted to the ends of a traditional society. In Soroush's terms, religious knowledge in its current state, so deeply impacted by Islamists like Qutb and Khomeini, cannot durably or profitably coexist with political life organized according to advancements in the other spheres of learning, so decisively shaped by the advances and assumptions of the modern West.

Soroush calls this the “crisis of modernity.” The “old equilibrium”—the kind of unity of intellectual life necessary for stable politics on the traditional model—has been shattered everywhere.¹⁰¹⁹ Soroush traces the end of the possibility of an integrated traditional political community to the contributions of Western thinkers, specifically Galileo and Hobbes, and the political consequences of their revolutionary ideas.¹⁰²⁰ Their ideas, “outfitted with the weapons of science and technology,” spread well beyond the Christian world, enchanting audiences and taking hold throughout the Islamic world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They succeeded in Persia and the Ottoman Empire because the Islamic world had grown “stagnant and feeble”—“we had nothing left in the

¹⁰¹⁹ Soroush, “Tradition and Modernism,” trans. Roya Monajem. *Kīan Monthly Review*, Vol. 10: 54 (Oct-Nov. 2000).

¹⁰²⁰ Soroush, “Tradition and Modernism,” trans. Roya Monajem. *Kīan Monthly Review*, Vol. 10: 54 (Oct-Nov. 2000).

storehouse of our religious and native cultures save a few dried up formalities, habits, and conventions,” as Soroush puts it—while the West was still “strong” and self-confident.¹⁰²¹ Echoes of Malek Bennabi’s radical critique are unmistakable: the West was able to colonize the East, and to some extent, the Eastern mind, because the East had grown “colonizable” for allowing the tension between reason and revelation to dissipate. And yet, the Islamic world has not been allowed fully to embrace a new, modern, equilibrium across the branches of learning, and thereby, a modern form of constitutional government. Anachronistic ideals, espoused so powerfully by Qutb, Khomeini, and the like, enliven the present resurgence of a deliberately anti-modern Islam. Their teachings have taken partial hold in the context of the persistent political and economic failures of the last century—what seem to prove Western ways have failed in the Islamic world—and they have resonated especially well in the context of persistent military humiliations at the hands of Western powers as well as the ongoing perception (deliberately fuelled and amplified by the same Islamists) that the imperialist West continues to meddle with impunity in Muslims’ affairs.

The root of the crisis Soroush perceives is the invincible fact that the epistemological and metaphysical assumptions underlying Islamist ideologies are utterly irreconcilable with modern science and the edifice built to support it—a new conception of man, a new way of conceiving of knowledge, an understanding of nature as governed by unchanging laws—none of which can be wiped from the Islamic mind completely. To put it another way, “the project of modernity” reached the Islamic world and it led to the

¹⁰²¹ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 160.

“demystification of the human being”;¹⁰²² politicized Islam presumes a world in which the traditional understanding of man’s utter dependence on God—his utter submission of mind to revelation as the only way to truth—remains more or less in tact.

Islamists like Khomeini and Qutb were not oblivious to the antagonism; they interpreted Western “advances” as symptoms of decline and corruption—or worse, *post hoc* theoretical justifications for an easy, self-indulgent, and Godless existence inspired by Satan himself—and thus advocated minimizing or otherwise subordinating the incompatible spheres of learning to a literal interpretation of revealed doctrine. (Of course, they had to acknowledge that a place for modern science, at least its technical fruit, would have to be made from calculations of ordinary political necessity). Soroush reverses their argument. He believes “religious knowledge” continues to stagnate in the Islamic world, even as learning elsewhere advanced, precisely because of Islamists’ vain and domineering claims to a monopoly over the entire intellectual sphere. He agrees that the first source of the stagnation can be traced back further still, to the centuries-old theological and legal arguments upon which men like Qutb and Khomeini have based their programs. Like other modernizers, he identifies the closing of the gates of *ijtihad* in the eleventh century—what amounts to the self-conscious abdication of reason and the utter subordination of mind to revealed teachings—as the first cause of today’s malaise.¹⁰²³ His solution is to blow the gates open in a radical new way. Soroush is not simply calling for “a critical reading of the corpus of Islamic texts and doctrine so that we

¹⁰²² Noor, “The Responsibilities of the Muslim Intellectual in the 21st Century.”

¹⁰²³ Noor, “The Responsibilities of the Muslim Intellectual in the 21st Century.”

can begin to break free from the dogmas of the past” which, although relevant for Muslims in a pre-modern age, no longer provide useful political guidance.¹⁰²⁴ Bolder yet, he demands that religious learning be allowed to reform itself in light of free and open dialogue with the other—Western—branches of learning. As Valla Vakili has written, in Soroush’s thought, “there is an intimate connection—a ‘continuous dialogue’—between religious and nonreligious branches of knowledge.”¹⁰²⁵ The reconciliation of Islam with the spheres of learning that have, by their advancement, created the modern West, will, he expects, ultimately have an inevitable sliming effect on Islam’s political claims.

What is more, it is the role of intellectuals to bring about this transformation. For Soroush, “[e]very change or revolution in society has two aspects: one is the practical destruction and the other, the theoretical innovation.”¹⁰²⁶ It is the intellectual’s task to “first and foremost, engage in theoretical innovation and the production of ideas.”¹⁰²⁷ Soroush’s own thought nicely demonstrates the kind of interplay among the various spheres of understanding he asserts to be so important. He constantly refers to a wide array of thinkers—from classical Persian poets; to the great mystic, al-Ghazali; to the towering figures of classical Greek philosophy; to seminal thinkers in the philosophy of science; to contemporary political and literary theorists including Foucault, Habermas and Rorty—incorporating ideas drawn from each in his effort to present a modern and moderate manner of interpreting and living Islam. Put another way, a lasting revolution

¹⁰²⁴ Noor, “The Responsibilities of the Muslim Intellectual in the 21st Century.”

¹⁰²⁵ Valla Vakili, “Abdulkarim Soroush and Critical Discourse in Iran,” in John Esposito and John Voll, eds., *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 154.

¹⁰²⁶ Nilou Mobasser, trans. “Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power”

¹⁰²⁷ Nilou Mobasser, trans. “Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power,” near the beginning.

or “progressive movement” must present a coherent family of theories (stretching across the spheres of learning) that will resonate with the people when the old regime is discredited and its power structure overturned. The theoretical dimension, Soroush goes on to explain, “is supplied by intellectuals (who have a commanding view of the rupture between modernity and tradition, and are privy to its secrets). Without this theoretical dimension, a revolution is nothing but a temporary rebellion.”¹⁰²⁸ Hassan Abbas sums up the Iranian’s “prescriptions” for the Muslim world this way: “The crux of Soroush’s argument is that there is no shame in choosing to maintain or abandon certain elements of one’s culture on the basis of investigation, insight, and critical inquiry. Here, he aggressively makes a case for rational choice in the world of ideas.”¹⁰²⁹

Asked by an interviewer whether he means, by his own (prolific) lecture schedule and his voluminous writings, to “create a social base for a particular school of thought,” Soroush qualifies his answer in an important respect. He insists that he has no intention of building a school or inspiring a party of followers; in fact, he claims that “a keen audience already exists” in Iran.¹⁰³⁰ Soroush denies interest in founding a school for at least two important reasons: in the first place, he is adamant that worldly gain and the theoretical pursuits should not be combined; to the extent intellectuals (be they scholars of a secular mind or religious experts) are motivated by worldly gain—power, popular esteem, gaining partisans, money, etc.—their theoretical contributions are likely to be perverted in service to personal ambition. (This, in the final analysis, is the lynchpin of his frequent

¹⁰²⁸ Nilou Mobasser, trans. “Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power,” near the beginning.

¹⁰²⁹ Hassan Abbas, “‘Islam versus the West’ and the Political Thought of AbdolKarim Soroush,” *The Fletcher School Online Journal*, (Spring 2006), 3.

¹⁰³⁰ Nilou Mobasser, trans. “Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power,” near the middle.

criticism of Iran's theocrats: the conservative religious establishment radicalizes religion and totalizes politics because they must twist and distort religion in order to justify and maintain political power on earth.¹⁰³¹ On this point, his argument tracks Locke and Spinoza's criticisms of a politicized ecclesiastical class almost exactly.) Second, and perhaps as important, he attributes his own intellectual activities to a debt he owes to those who continue to resist the orthodox religious dogmas of the Iranian Revolution in the name of liberal principles. It is they—not him—who keep the possibility of renewal alive. The intellectual's role, it is worth emphasizing, is to refine and ennoble the guiding ideas or principles revolutions cannot be successful and enduring without.

Reforming Islam in Light of Select Western Commitments

Having proposed an authorizing meta-theory—his theory of the expansion and contraction of religious understanding purports to legitimate what Islamists forbid, namely, interpretative liberty in the realm of religious knowledge—Soroush presents three dominant ideals across his writings, *mainly drawn from other spheres of learning*, which he believes can help transform Islam in such a way as to reconcile it with the wider intellectual landscape and liberal democracy. First, and most important, he restores an understanding of man that ascribes significant dignity of the human intellect; man's capacity for reason is, for Soroush, innately connected to his capacity for freedom. Second, he posits, on extra-religious grounds, that human beings have natural rights and

¹⁰³¹ Nilou Mobasser, trans. "Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power."

that a government must above all things respect those rights; no government that fails to respect the rights of its *citizens* (a modern conception Soroush embraces) can be legitimate. Third, he argues that Islam should be understood as a personal and spiritual religion of love, as opposed to a political religion that has its effect through fear.

These additions and adjustments are necessary, in Soroush's opinion, to render Islam—in the places it has become politicized—compatible with liberal democracy. (He even holds out hope that a reformed Islam might support a morally upright democratic regime, one that avoids the perils of relativism so apparent and damaging in the West.)¹⁰³² It is worth underlining, however, that Soroush believes the prerequisite of successful political reform in the Islamic world is a prior intellectual transformation: Muslims' sacred opinions must change where assertive Islamist ideologies have left so many adherents in contradiction with themselves. He recognizes that liberal democracy requires a "philosophical underpinning, even [a] theological underpinning." Because a "despotic God would not be compatible with democratic rule, with the idea of rights," Soroush acknowledges that in certain places political liberalism will require believers "to change [their] God."¹⁰³³ He argues, moreover, that the indispensable commitments of the modern liberal personality are *not* latent in Islam; rather, they must be imported from the West. Efforts to twist the tenets of Islam in such a way as to muster the power of scripture on behalf of liberal commitments is not an utterly useless endeavor—indeed, Soroush himself takes up the

¹⁰³² Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 128.

¹⁰³³ <http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-HomaTV.html>.

tactic from time to time—but it is, in his opinion, insufficient to the great task at hand. In this respect, Soroush's thought is especially radical:

The present argument, unlike the writings of some Islamic thinkers, makes no attempt to place the entire weight of the conceptual edifice of democracy upon the frail shoulders of such (intrareligious) precepts as consultation [*shura*], consensus of the faithful [*ijma'*], and oath of loyalty to a ruler [*bei'at*]. Rather, the discourse on religious government should commence with a discussion of human rights, justice, and restriction of power (all extrareligious issues). Only then should one try to harmonize one's religious understanding with them.¹⁰³⁴

In a later interview, Soroush expresses himself in even more assertive terms:

I take strong exception to people who present the terms allegiance, consultative council and so on—which existed in the past—as the progenitors of the new concept of democracy. My objection is that this is absolutely impossible, because the foundation stone of modern democratic thought is the concept of right and there was no such creature as the right-bearing human being living on this in the past... This is the enormity of the gap between the old world and the new, and this gap cannot be filled with ideas such as allegiance and consultative councils.¹⁰³⁵

Since Soroush cannot find in Islam proper grounding for the sacred opinions he believes to be indispensable to modern liberal democracy, he defends their importation on the basis of his expansion theory: religious learning in the Islamic world should be allowed to expand in light of modern ideas. The first revolutionary commitment Soroush means to instill requires transforming individuals' conception of the reach of the human intellect and the dignity of reason. The interpretation of Islam Soroush rejects—especially, the Islamists' emphasis on utter submission of mind—is more like an “ideology” than a faith. By this, he means that the constituent ideas or dogmas that make up the ideology “have causes but no reasons.”¹⁰³⁶ While it is easy enough to see where Islamist ideas came from

¹⁰³⁴ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 132.

¹⁰³⁵ Nilou Mobasser, trans. “Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power,” near the end.

¹⁰³⁶ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 94.

(Ash'ari theology; Stalinist ideas about the state's scope and purpose; resentment engendered by, and reaction against, Western imperialism; and the vanity and power-lust of contemporary jurists all played roles) the politicized interpretation does not withstand rational scrutiny, which is what Soroush is calling for.¹⁰³⁷ Thus, “in this sense ideology is the veil of reason; it is the enemy of rationality and clarity. It contradicts objectivity and forces one to see the world through a single narrow aperture.” Islamists’ denunciation of reason is thus a self-preservation mechanism; their ideology “conceals its falseness by placing it[self] above rational discourse.”¹⁰³⁸ Soroush means to rehabilitate reason because reason defines man; human beings *are* rational creatures. On this, his disagreement with Khomeini—for whom reason is usually a tool men employ to satisfy and amplify their bestial appetites, and at best, the handmaiden of theology—could not be more pronounced. For Soroush, to the extent an ideology claiming religious authority interferes with man’s employment of his defining ability, the ideology deserves no deference at all. What is more, freedom as worthy ideal springs from man’s defining capacity. Protecting it is a justifiable end of the state insofar as it is both prerequisite for the employment of human reason, and because man’s rational capacity makes possible the good and noble use of liberty. As Soroush puts it,

We are impassioned about freedom and consider it the *sine qua non* of humanity because reason and freedom are inextricably intertwined. The

¹⁰³⁷ Admittedly, Soroush’s epistemology limits the reach of reason in a significant respect. He calls for investigation of religious knowledge in the light of the advancement of extra-religious learning, but presumes the advancement of those spheres is wedded irreparably to invincible historical and cultural factors. His historicist assumptions thereby appear to constitute an emphatic denial that reason can access permanent truths. In this respect, it would seem that Soroush is a product of *his* engagement with postmodern thought.

¹⁰³⁸ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 94.

absence of one would vitiate the existence of the other. Freedom belongs to the rational human beings. Reason requires the company of its close kindred spirit: freedom.¹⁰³⁹

And yet, Soroush conceives of “internal freedom” in a manner similar to Khomeini: he, like the Ayatollah, believes “internal freedom is achieved by liberating oneself from the reign of passion and anger.”¹⁰⁴⁰ Soroush agrees, furthermore, that an important distinction is to be drawn between freedom and licentiousness; freedom does not mean “throwing caution to the winds” or giving oneself over to the demands of appetite, emotion, or vanity.¹⁰⁴¹ He departs company with Khomeini on the latter’s insistence that an indoctrinating education in service of complete submission of mind to revealed teaching is the essential prerequisite of this type of restrained self-mastery. For Soroush, reason has an important role to play in the attainment of internal freedom: man must have the liberty freely to choose the ideals according to which he will arrange his life and order his soul. The prerequisite is therefore not a domineering religious education, but political freedom. An intellectual marketplace of ideas is particularly important. It both drives forward the advancement of learning across spheres of understanding and, at the same time, makes possible individuals’ attainment of internal freedom. As Soroush puts it, “In a closed and oppressive system, there is no contest between the people, so the government arbitrarily promotes some to the positions of leadership. People do not get to compete, and truths do not get a chance to shine against falsehoods.”¹⁰⁴² Soroush, thus, appears to work from a happier conception of human nature; human beings are

¹⁰³⁹ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 89.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 99.

¹⁰⁴¹ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 99.

¹⁰⁴² Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 99.

sufficiently well constituted, morally and intellectually, to choose for themselves a worthwhile plan of living where they permitted the opportunity. While he believes religion is a vitally important part of the marketplace of ideas, only a gentler, depoliticized, religion can play a productive role. Moreover, freedom of conscience—that is, the separation of religion and coercive authority—is the prerequisite of genuine faith. He agrees with John Locke’s contention that true belief is embraced willingly—“not because it was imposed, or inherited, or part of the dominant local culture.”¹⁰⁴³ It follows that Soroush’s opinion of a religious elite (in particular, Iran’s) is far more pessimistic than Khomeini’s. “Excessive power” has “enormous potential to corrupt.”¹⁰⁴⁴ For Soroush, the nexus of religious authority and political authority is detrimental—not only to religious practice, which it radicalizes, but also to the open and vibrant intellectual sphere, which is, for Soroush, the real prerequisite of the virtue (internal freedom) both he and Khomeini profess to champion.

Notice again that Soroush does not derive these principles from Islam. This optimistic portrayal of man—as reasonable and free by nature—seems rather to be derived from classical philosophy fused with the Enlightenment rebellion against God. Good democratic government, Soroush proceeds to argue, depends on citizens’ employment of their rational capacities within an intellectual climate that makes an important place to Islam. Soroush’s solution to the perennial political dilemma faced by popular regimes—ensuring a significant confluence of wisdom and legislative authority, while recognizing

¹⁰⁴³ Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows*, 268.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 103.

that the people are sovereign—is drawn from yet another source. On this, he is eminently a progressive. He argues that the precondition of “democratizing religious government is historicizing and energizing the religious understanding by underscoring the role of reason in it.”¹⁰⁴⁵ As he goes on to explain in terms that could almost have leapt from the pages of John Dewey, reason in its political manifestation has little to do with the political insights gleaned by the most impressive thinkers; rather, he means for public policy to be driven by “a collective reason arising from the kind of public participation and human experience that are available only through democratic methods.”¹⁰⁴⁶ If Soroush’s thought seems at times to be a schizophrenic amalgamation of not-always compatible strains of Western thought, it is no doubt nonetheless more than a small improvement on the Islamist alternative.

The second revolutionary commitment Soroush attempts to inject into Islam is a conception of individual rights that he self-consciously imports from the West.¹⁰⁴⁷ He goes so far as to assert that the “foundation stone” of liberal democracy is the recognition that human beings have rights, an idea he believes to be antithetical to the traditional conception of the human being as irreparably duty-bound.¹⁰⁴⁸ Furthermore, the widespread belief that all human beings have these rights is, for Soroush, the most important prerequisite for what he calls “civil society.” A civil society is one in which individuals are free to live and think as they please within very generous bounds. To the

¹⁰⁴⁵ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 127.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 127.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Robin Wright, “Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two Visions of Reformation,” *Journal of Democracy* 7:2 (1996), 71.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Nilou Mobasser, trans. “Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power,” near the end.

extent the recognition that human beings are endowed with unalienable rights is mutual and ubiquitous, the groups or factions that make up a political community “can live peacefully alongside one another, without any group having advantages of mastery over the others.”¹⁰⁴⁹ Indeed, insofar as tolerant and limited government presumes every faction will refrain from employing the coercive authority of the state to instantiate a virtuous political order that restricts the rights and liberties of those living according to different conceptions of a good life, limited constitutional government depends on a kind of collective self-restraint born of the recognition that every human being is endowed with an equal claim to live as he or she pleases within a fairly generous sphere protected by law.¹⁰⁵⁰

Soroush admits that “this civil society is not really in keeping with our current religious thinking and the existing reading of religion,” and calls on Muslims under the sway of Islamist doctrines to amend their beliefs on the question of rights, which is to say he calls on those most powerfully attached to an illiberal religious ideology to adopt an altogether new conception of man’s very nature.¹⁰⁵¹ He acknowledges, furthermore, that the modern conception of human rights is a product of the European Enlightenment,¹⁰⁵² but maintains that the notion is compatible with (though certainly not mandated by) Islam, at least if one emphasizes the most conducive tenets.¹⁰⁵³ On the question of a just regime, however, he is unambiguous: no regime that fails to protect the rights and freedoms of its

¹⁰⁴⁹ Nilou Mobasser, trans. “Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power,” near the middle.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 129.

¹⁰⁵¹ Nilou Mobasser, trans. “Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power,” near the middle.

¹⁰⁵² Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 129.

¹⁰⁵³ Nilou Mobasser, trans. “Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power,” near the end.

inhabitant—*its citizens*—is “tenable” in the modern world.¹⁰⁵⁴ He utterly rejects Khomeini’s conception of justice, according to which a just regime is a virtuous regime, and the prerequisite of virtue, the restriction of human liberty. For Soroush, “no seeker of justice can be indifferent to the question of freedom. If we define justice as the realization of all rights, it would be an affront to justice to neglect the right to be free.”¹⁰⁵⁵

In the aftermath of the 2009 public demonstrations, Soroush went so far as to write Ayatollah Khomeini, the present Supreme Guide of the Islamic Republic and Ayatollah Khomeini’s successor. In his letter, he blames the theocracy for turning Iran into a “grim land” and expresses the crux of his disagreement with the Ayatollahs this way: “our deep difference lies in the fact that I believe that tyranny is bad by its very essence, whereas you believe that tyranny is fine as long as it is at the service of religion and that tyranny can be combined with religiosity.”¹⁰⁵⁶ He goes on to accuse Khomeini of embracing a “conception of religion which harks back to Sayyid Qutb.”¹⁰⁵⁷ For Soroush, Islamists, on both the Sunni and Shiite side, are ultimately responsible for the crisis of modernity as it affects the Islamic world. Their powerful arguments—cloaked in pious garb and armed with compelling denunciations of the West—have prevented a large proportion of the Muslim world from enjoying the blessings of liberty and prosperity that are part and parcel of modernity. *Ideas*, then, are to blame: for the corruption of Islam, for the

¹⁰⁵⁴ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 128.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 97.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Abdolkarim Soroush, “Letter to Ayatollah Khamenei,” 10 January, 2010. Available at http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/By_DrSoroush/E-CMB-20120110-YouHaveTurnedIranIntoAGrimLand.html

¹⁰⁵⁷ Abdolkarim Soroush, “Letter to Ayatollah Khamenei,” 10 January, 2010.

continuing backwardness of a significant part of the world, and for the enduring suffering of millions.

The third transformation of Islamic practice Soroush prescribes is not an alien importation but an adjustment of interpretation for which there is precedent in Islam. He rejects politicized and ideological manner of practicing Islam that are based on fear. Al-Ghazali, who was largely responsible for closing the gates of *ijtihad* in the service of the establishment of a domineering legal code, exemplifies “fear-based mysticism in its most detailed and eloquent form.”¹⁰⁵⁸ In the same spirit, and like Qutb before him, Khomeini emphasizes the vital importance of terrifying punishments to the establishment of an environment sufficiently hard that selfish and prideful human beings can be made to practice and internalize virtuous habits. Soroush rejects this understanding and prefers, instead, a “love-based” mysticism, of which the best exemplar is Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi.¹⁰⁵⁹ It was Rumi, a poet, jurist, and mystic who lived in the thirteenth century, whom Soroush credits for reforming his own interpretation of Islam. “Truly, had it not been for Rumi,” he admits, “perhaps no one could have freed me from al-Ghazali’s charm.”¹⁰⁶⁰ In particular, Rumi taught Soroush that there is “such a thing as an individual religion based on personal experiences” in Islam.

To personalize the practice of Islam—such that believers themselves conceive of worship as an individual’s private spiritual relationship with God—would go a long way toward moderating Islam’s capacity to dominate the political sphere. “[T]he true place of

¹⁰⁵⁸ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 17.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 17.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 17.

religion in society” is, on Soroush’s understanding, a fairly narrow one. Since the Revolution, “the greatest pathology of religion... is that it has become plump, even swollen”; “purifying religion,” on his account, requires “making it lighter and more buoyant, in other words, rendering religion more slender by sifting, whittling away, erasing the superfluous layers off the face of religiosity.”¹⁰⁶¹ Islam does not contain a blueprint for government. Indeed, Khomeini could only point at the general example of the Prophet and the Commander of the Faithful—and their exercise of unfettered political and military authority—in his effort to legitimate a totalitarian religious state; he cannot point to particular verses of the Qur’an, or specific traditions, as mandating Iran’s strange blend of an ostensibly parliamentary form of government suffocated by tyrannical clerical supervision. As Valla Vakili helpfully sums up, for Soroush, “Islam at best contains certain legal commandments... [which] can only respond to a limited range of legal issues.” Iran’s laws “must not violate religious values, but they cannot be derived from religion itself.”¹⁰⁶² Beyond this, Soroush is a proponent of modern liberal democracy and the expert administration of the state. Government should be representative and limited; and administrative methods should be derived from the modern social sciences, including economics and public administration.¹⁰⁶³

Finally, it bears notice that Soroush is a believing Muslim and hopes the reforms he is advocating will save Islam from repeating the unhappy fate of Christianity in the West, while at the same time constituting a solid foundation for a kind of morally upright

¹⁰⁶¹ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 21

¹⁰⁶² Valla Vakil, “Debating Religion and Politics in Iran: The Political Thought of Abdolkarim Soroush,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, January, 1997.

¹⁰⁶³ Vakil, “Debating Religion and Politics in Iran.”

constitutional regime. On Soroush's reading, the Islamic world can learn from the drama that built the modern—ultimately, the postmodern—West. The Reformation, subsequent attacks on the Church, and the persistent erosion of Christianity are not inevitable consequences of liberal democracy or its indispensable ideational commitments; the erosion of religious belief in the West was, rather, the accidental consequence of a misdirected, though understandable, reaction to the corruption of Christianity by vain and prideful Churchmen, and the political fanaticism their politicization of religious beliefs made possible.¹⁰⁶⁴ Soroush condemns Iran's religious elite in such harsh terms for what it has done to Islam as much as for their political crimes; for he foresees the possibility Iran's brutal theocracy will arouse a similarly vehement reaction in the Muslim world, one that might accidentally be directed at Islam itself rather than those responsible for its corruption.

For Soroush, Islam has an indispensable public role to play in a decent and upright regime; but it should play that role through a genuinely sovereign people in their exercise of their legislative authority. On this question, Soroush sounds very much like America's founders, who doubted the possibility of upright constitutional government absent a vibrant—but independent—moral-religious sphere. They believed religious commitments would inform government and policy—not directly, by an official establishment—but by nourishing civic virtue in a self-governing people, and by helping to mold morally upright lovers of the common good to lead it as elected statesmen. As Soroush puts it,

¹⁰⁶⁴ Vakil, "Debating Religion and Politics in Iran."

[D]emocratic religious regimes need not wash their hands of religiosity nor turn their backs on God's approval. In order to remain religious, they, of course, need to establish religion as the guide and arbiter of their problems and conflicts... Securing the Creator's approval entails religious awareness that is leavened by a more authentic and humane understanding of religiosity and that endeavors to guide the people in accordance with these ideals. In thus averting a radically relativistic version of liberalism, rational and informed religiosity can thrive in conjunction with a democracy sheltered by common sense...¹⁰⁶⁵

For Soroush, a radically secular and excessively permissive liberal democracy is scarcely more conducive to decent political life than a fanatical theocracy: neither supports the kind of “internal freedom” that redeems human life. He envisions “the reconciliation between the two [reason and religion],” what requires that both be fairly humble or restrained in their demands.¹⁰⁶⁶ Soroush intends, in other words, to make a place for reason in the Islamic world without undermining the politically indispensable (and perhaps also the morally indispensable) claims of faith. He argues for a depoliticized Islam – one inhospitable to abuse by a scholarly establishment on the one hand, and supportive of a natural rights teaching and the dignity of the human intellect on the other – that will nonetheless exert a guiding political impact by forming upright citizens within a private sphere kept at some distance from the levers of power, but not completely separated from the public sphere. This explains why Soroush refrains from advocating reforms so radical as Spinoza's in the West. True, Soroush tends to cite Rumi as his inspiration and authority when he is espousing his most liberal interpretations of Islam. More importantly, however, he declines to arm his modernizing arguments with the most powerful rhetoric available to him; he deliberately avoids advocating religious reform in

¹⁰⁶⁵ Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam*, 128.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows*, 275.

terms that might corrode the moral authority of sacred text *tout court*. Thus, there is no outright assault on the truth of prophecy, the possibility of miracles, or the divine dignity and legitimacy of sacred text. Nor does Soroush believe it necessary to import the commitments and assumptions of European romanticism. There is no room in an upright popular regime, on his account, for the radical species of relativism that an overemphasis on sentiment, feeling, aesthetics, and grand action risks inspiring.

By his restraint, however, Soroush may risk limiting his popular impact. Spinoza was so effective precisely because he marshaled the authority of the Bible in service of a radically individualistic way of conceiving of the individual, his rights, and his relationship to both God and political community. His ideas took hold against the backdrop of political crises in Europe, the brutal wars of religion that were convulsing the Christian powers and horrifying Christians, many of them slaughtered or maimed by the excesses of fanatics. The Islamic world may well be in the midst of a similar crisis today. Whether Soroush's proposed reforms will seem respectable enough, on the grounds he has provided for them, that they too gain wide and enthusiastic adherence remains an open question. It took a more radical approach to build modern Turkey, a question that is taken up in the following chapter.

CHAPTER X

A DELIBERATE FOUNDING: TURKEY'S *MIXED* REGIME

Modern Turkey is the result of a confrontation between Turks who were committed to the ideals associated with the modern West and those committed either to the old Ottoman regime or to Islam as organizing principle of the regime.¹⁰⁶⁷ Reformers carried the day, especially after World War I. Turkey's success in moving toward modern and moderate government was so impressive that, for a time, the country was even considered a serious candidate for admission to the European Union, a considerable feat for a country that was not long ago the ruling heart of the Ottoman Empire and titular seat of the Islamic Caliphate. In the space of a century, a loose amalgamation of disparate tribes and people, many of them in most respects pre-modern, has become an emerging economic and diplomatic power governed according to constitutional principles. Free and fair elections are held according to schedule, the results are allowed to stand (most of the time), and the country ranks as the region's freest (not counting Israel).¹⁰⁶⁸

Every student of government knows that Mustafa Kemal, known today as Atatürk, is the father of the modern Turkey. It is widely recognized, moreover, that Atatürk's reforms were deliberate, thorough, and far-reaching. As one Turkey expert recently explained,

No nation was ever founded with greater revolutionary zeal than the Turkish Republic, nor has any undergone more sweeping change in such a short time. In a very few years after 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

¹⁰⁶⁷ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 52.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Freedom House,
[http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw11/CombinedAverageRatings\(IndependentCountries\)FIW2011.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw11/CombinedAverageRatings(IndependentCountries)FIW2011.pdf)

transformed a shattered and bewildered nation into one obsessed with progress. His was a one-man revolution, imposed and steered from above. Atatürk knew that Turks were not ready to break violently with their past, embrace modernity and turn decisively toward the West. He also knew, however, that doing so would be the only way for them to shape a new destiny for themselves and their nation. So he forced them, often over the howling protests of the old order.¹⁰⁶⁹

And yet, Turkey's steps toward modern and moderate constitutional government began long before the Republic was declared and the Caliphate abolished in the years following WWI. In fact, the intellectual roots of the effort to modernize the regime, driven by pro-Western elites in the military and the bureaucracy, can be traced back to the eighteenth century. For generations, reform-minded Turks worked to revolutionize the regime in important social and legal respects. Although early efforts at constitutional reform were unsuccessful, and even provoked conservative retrenchment, reformers' emphasis on educational reform yielded lasting results.¹⁰⁷⁰ For while the early revolutionaries were certainly not Europhiles, they introduced European ideas that took hold and quickly spread.

Building the Young Turks

The proximate cause of this intellectual transformation was military and economic necessity. Early modernizers in the Ottoman Empire were, in the first place, those willing to come to terms with a distressing reality: their Empire was ill-suited to integrate into an international system increasingly dominated by the modern Western nation states, and

¹⁰⁶⁹ Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent & Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 10.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 151.

worse still, utterly unable to compete with them on the battlefield. Napoleon's crushing conquest of Egypt in 1798 was a humiliation felt throughout the Islamic world, one that foreshadowed many more to come. Not an Indian province remained independent by the middle of the nineteenth century; Austria and Russia, meanwhile, had captured Muslim lands closer to Anatolia from which they posed a strategic threat to both the Empire and to Persia. Most difficult to accept: features of the civilization and regime deeply tied to its identity—many of them having to do with Islam—were at the core of their incompatibility with the West, and therefore, the cause of the Empire's weakness. These exigencies opened Turkish minds to Western ideas at the end of the eighteenth century, if in an altogether accidental way. The Sultan sent young Ottomans to Europe to learn about modern military and administrative techniques with the aim of strengthening the Empire. But with the arts of war, students attending the Empire's military academies, the very men who were destined to become its ruling elite, absorbed Europe's languages and its revolutionary ideas. Subsequent generations imported and further disseminated those ideas. Over time, the schools they built would become "nurseries of revolutionaries."¹⁰⁷¹ One of them, a poet-patriot and political theorist named Namik Kemal, whom to this day some refer to as 'the poet of liberty,' did more than simply bring the Enlightenment ideas of Europe to the East—he made them respectable. A disciple of Rousseau and Montesquieu who was ultimately exiled for his efforts, he translated their works and advanced arguments not unlike those of Spinoza and Locke in the West, contending on the basis of Holy Writ that Islam was in fact

¹⁰⁷¹ Andrew Mango, *Atatürk*. (New York: The Overlook Press, 1999), 16.

compatible with – even demanded! – representative and consultative government. He proposed, as Bernard Lewis has explained, that “all that is best in European civilization derived from or could be paralleled in classical Islamic civilization, and the Muslim, in adopting these things, was returning to what was deepest and most authentic in his own tradition.”¹⁰⁷² True or not, only arguments that marshal the power of reigning sacred opinions can make the gradual adoption of new ones possible in fact. London’s parliament was Kemal’s practical inspiration, and Kemal himself, the first Turk to “achieve a clear vision of freedom and self-government under law.”¹⁰⁷³

In the context of the Islamist arguments so potent today, Namik Kemal’s approach to Qur’anic interpretation seems perhaps even more radical than it was in his time. For instance, having made the Lockean points that human beings are by nature free (“created free by God”) and endowed with a “natural right” to the exercise their faculties as they see fit, he goes on to explain that society is also obliged to use the preponderance of force amassed by the state to protect individuals’ rights according to principle of consent. As he explains in an interpretation of the Qur’an (Sura 3, Verse 159), written for wide public consumption,

General freedom is protected within society because society can produce a preponderant force to safeguard the individual from the fear of the aggression on the part of another individual... Therefore, just as all individuals have the natural right to exercise their own power, so too conjoined powers naturally belong to all individuals as a whole, and

¹⁰⁷² Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 142.

¹⁰⁷³ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 143.

consequently in every society the right to sovereignty belongs to the public.¹⁰⁷⁴

More important than his espousal of this alien Enlightenment idea, however, is the religious justification he appends. Kemal argues that while the judicial authority does not in the first place reside with the people, executive authority is delegated by, and contingent upon the continued consent of, the governed—*all of this, according to Islamic law*.

A *shar'* [religious law] proof of this claim is the following legal rule:

If the people of a town gathered and appointed someone as *qadi* [judge] over themselves to judge cases arising among them, the judicial activity of this person could not be valid; judicial authority would still belong to the *qadi* appointed by the state because jurisdiction is a right of the government. But if the people of a town gathered and pledged allegiance to someone for the sultanate or caliphate, this person would [indeed] become sultan or caliph, while the previous sultan or caliph would retain no authority whatever, because the imamate is a right of the *umma* [the Islamic community].

The public cannot perform the duties attached to this right for themselves, so the appointment of an *imam* [leader] and the establishment of a government are indispensable. This is obviously nothing other than society's delegating the performance of the aforementioned duties to some of its members. Accordingly, monarchs have no right to govern other than the authorization granted to them by the *umma* in the form of allegiance [*bay'a*], and the authorization granted to ministers through appointment by monarchs. The apt saying in the *hadith* [tradition of the Prophet] "the leader of the tribe is its servant" hints at this.¹⁰⁷⁵

In addition to penning patriotic poetry that fanned the burgeoning nationalism of the Young Turks, Namik Kemal took overt political steps to help modernize Turkey. He was a member of the commission that wrote the 18XX Constitution, to the restoration of which the Young Turks initially devoted their energies. Later, from Paris, he published an opposition journal called *Hürriyet* (Liberty) dedicated to explaining constitutionalism

¹⁰⁷⁴ Namik Kemal, "And Seek Their Counsel in the Matter." In *Modern Islam: A Sourcebook*. Charles Kurzman, Editor. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). 144.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Namik Kemal, "And Seek Their Counsel in the Matter," 145.

while “attempting to reconcile *Sharia* with European theories of law.”¹⁰⁷⁶ According to Bernard Lewis, he was the first Ottoman to “achieve a clear vision of freedom and self-government under law.”¹⁰⁷⁷

Namik Kemal, a philosopher, exerted his most profound political influence by way of a statesman enamored of his teachings, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. His ideas had so thoroughgoing an effect on the father of modern Turkey that the pupil, born Mustafa to a devout woman of humble means, is said to have taken his second name as a tribute to the political theorist whose thought so deeply molded own his political ambition.¹⁰⁷⁸ By the end of his life, Atatürk had dropped Mustafa altogether – it was “too Arab-sounding” for his modern sensibilities – preferring instead to be known, appropriately, as Kemal Atatürk—a name which invokes his legacy as the father of modern Turkey while reminding of Namik Kemal’s enduring importance.¹⁰⁷⁹

Other theorists made similar arguments. Said Nursi, a contemporary of Atatürk who initially supported the Young Turks’ call for constitutional government, contended that the era of “jihad of the sword” had been eclipsed by a new era of reason, a return to “jihad of the word” in Islamic civilization.¹⁰⁸⁰ As his English language intellectual biographer explains, Nursi contributed to the revolution in its early days by arguing

¹⁰⁷⁶ Namik Kemal, “And Seek Their Counsel in the Matter,” 144.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*. 142-143.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Andrew Mango, *Atatürk*. (New York: The Overlook Press, 1999). 37.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent & Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds*, 48.

¹⁰⁸⁰ RAND, *The Muslim World After 9/11*, 15; cf., Ali Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 55.

publicly in favor of “the conformity of constitutionalism with the Sharia.”¹⁰⁸¹ Persuading a population ill-acquainted with constitutional principles “of [the revolution’s] manifold benefits” in order to “arouse the consciences of Muslims to the potentials of unity and brotherhood, and to urge them down the way of progress” was the intention that animated his public pronouncements¹⁰⁸² (although in later years, Nursi became a leading critic of secularism and the materialist and positivistic philosophies that undergirded the Young Turks’ most radical reforms.) Nonetheless, his contribution to the revolution he would later decry was important:

In virtually all of the speeches, newspaper articles, and other writings that have been preserved, Nursi uses the ideas and terminology of the liberal though made familiar to the Ottoman intellectuals in the nineteenth century by Namik Kemal and the Young Ottomans, and their successors. That is to say, with his speeches and articles he was attempting to familiarize the people with such concepts as constitutionalism, consultation, freedom, despotism, progress, civilization, fatherland, and nation (*millet*). However, he always in some way links these concepts with Islam.¹⁰⁸³

At the risk of belaboring this immensely important point, one further example merits consideration. Ziya Gökalp, born to a man of modernist sensibilities with a deep admiration for Namik Kemal, was an important member of the Committee of Union and Progress in the lead-up to World War I. His ability to read French allowed him to become well versed in contemporary social science literature and he quickly became a leading advocate of Turkish nationalism and modernization. In an essay entitled “Islam and Modern Civilization,” he makes the radical argument that Islam is in fact more

¹⁰⁸¹ Sükran Vahide, “Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi,” *Islam at the Crossroads*, Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’, ed. (New York: SUNY Press, 2003), 6.

¹⁰⁸² Sükran Vahide, “Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi,” 6.

¹⁰⁸³ Sükran Vahide, “Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi,” 6.

compatible with modernity than Christianity.¹⁰⁸⁴ According to Gökalp's counter-intuitive argument, Roman Christianity had, by accepting "the separation of state and religion as a principle... formulated... in the slogan 'render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's,'" set up a permanent struggle for authority between claimants to ecclesiastical authority and temporal authorities.¹⁰⁸⁵

Far from conducing to modern constitutional government, the imperfectly demarcated separation of authority proposed by Christianity – especially when combined with the vanity of men (Gökalp describes the priesthood as an institution "contrary to the laws of nature and life") – inevitably leads to endless conflict, absolute rule, and the arrestment of social and political progress.¹⁰⁸⁶ The only alternative to religious war Gökalp could perceive for the West was the radical laicism of the French Revolution, which he aptly characterized as a "grave source of sickness for the French nation."¹⁰⁸⁷ In its rejection of any such separation, Islam did a better job preparing society for modern government. In the first place, there was no need for "Inquisition courts." Furthermore, by abjuring any such separation, Islam was better equipped to cultivate a people capable of constitutional government:

it was because Islam brought state, law, and court into the realm of the sacred that those traits such as loyalty to the secular ruler, a genuine fraternity, and solidarity among the believers, sacrifice of interests and life for the sake of *jihad* [holy struggle], tolerance and respect towards the

¹⁰⁸⁴ Ziya Gökalp, "Islam and Modern Civilization." In *Modernist Islam: A Sourcebook*. p. 192.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Ziya Gökalp, "Islam and Modern Civilization." In *Modernist Islam: A Sourcebook*. p. 193.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ziya Gökalp, "Islam and Modern Civilization." In *Modernist Islam: A Sourcebook*. P. 194-195.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ziya Gökalp, "Islam and Modern Civilization." In *Modernist Islam: A Sourcebook*. P. 195.

opinions of others, which are the very basis of a permanent order in society, were cultivated among all Muslims as common virtues.¹⁰⁸⁸

In fact, Gökalp goes so far as to assert that Protestantism is “a more or less Islamicized form of Christianity,” which, in his opinion, explains why “the modern state came into existence in Europe first in the Protestant countries.”¹⁰⁸⁹ If Islam shares with Reformed Christianity a de-emphasis on the authority of priests, we have already noted the peculiar susceptibility of many other aspects of Islamic law to more recent interpretations that rather impede the establishment of modern government, in part, by elevating a quasi-priestly body of vain scholars with an agenda of their own. What is important about Gökalp’s work for present purposes is not whether his arguments are in every respect correct in the final analysis, but rather, his success convincing Turks in his own era that Islam not only does not prohibit, but in fact *supports*, modern constitutional government.

As Robert Devereaux among others have explained, it was intellectuals like Gökalp – many of them, intimately familiar with Islamic law – who “formulated and popularized” the “intellectual currents” that made the emergence of modern Turkey possible. Ensar Yilmaz recently elaborated the point, noting that “Gökalp’s political discourse entailed the enlightenment of the people by the elite.” More precisely, Gökalp conceived of the state as a “soulless machine” and believed “it was necessary to add soul to the state,” what could only be achieved by creating a new “national culture.” Here again, the elite would lead the “effort to make the people adopt ‘the common good’ that had been created by

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ziya Gökalp, “Islam and Modern Civilization.” In *Modernist Islam: A Sourcebook*. P. 194.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ziya Gökalp, “Islam and Modern Civilization.” In *Modernist Islam: A Sourcebook*. P. 196.

mixing the values specific to Western civilization with the popular national cultural values.”¹⁰⁹⁰ Devereaux goes so far as to suggest that “without the foundation that had been laid by Gökâlp and his fellow Turkists, Atatürk’s achievements would have been impossible or, at least, vastly more difficult.”¹⁰⁹¹

It was these principles – advanced and made respectable by Ottoman philosophers and theologians – that inspired the generation of politicians and statesmen known in the West as the Young Turks. As political theorists from Aristotle to Machiavelli have recognized, public intellectuals (in the best case, philosophers) inspire and shape the ambition of those who are inclined to political action (in the best case, those Aristotle termed gentlemen). Though Atatürk was undoubtedly the man who ushered in Turkey’s modern reinvention in the years following WWI, it took a cadre of daring modernizers committed to dramatic reform to make Turkey’s transformation possible. That they were reared on the ideas of Kemal, Nursi, and Gökâlp – as opposed to the dangerous dreams of Islamists like al-Banna, Qutb, and Mawdudi – is perhaps the primary reason a constitutional regime that inclines toward the West emerged in Turkey. As early as 1876, prominent Europeans could perceive, at least among the elite, powerful sympathies for aspects of the Western political order. On 25 May, 1876, Sir Henry Elliot, the British ambassador, reported that

the word ‘Constitution’ was in every mouth; that the Softas [theological students], representing the intelligent public opinion of the capital, knowing themselves to be supported by the nation—Christians as well as Mahomentan—would not, I believe, relax their efforts till they obtained it, and that, should the Sultan refuse to grant it, an attempt to depose him

¹⁰⁹⁰ Ensar Yilmaz, “Ziya Gökâlp’s political sociology.” *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*. Vol. 2(3), pp. 029-033, March 2010. pp. 32-33.

¹⁰⁹¹ Ziya Gökâlp, *The Principles of Turkism*. Robert Devereaux, Ed. (E. J. Brill., 1968). p. x.

appeared almost inevitable; that texts from the Qur'an were circulated proving to the faithful that the form of government sanctioned by it was properly democratic, and that the absolute authority now wielded by the Sultan was an usurpation of the rights of the people and not sanctioned by Holy Law; and both texts and precedents were appealed to, to show that obedience was not due to a Sovereign who neglected the interests of the State...¹⁰⁹²

In sum, then, Enlightenment ideas, and the establishment of schools and academies modeled on Europe's, had "by the twentieth century... produced a ruling elite with the knowledge, the capacity, and above all the sense of responsibility and decision to carry through the great social and political revolution that made modern Turkey."¹⁰⁹³ Indeed, as numerous scholars have pointed out, "Most of the leaders of the Turkish nationalist resistance movement after the First World War were thus contemporaries at the Istanbul War College at the turn of the century."¹⁰⁹⁴ Atatürk and his fellow cadets surreptitiously discussed the dangerous ideas of political theorists, going so far as to produce a "handwritten newspaper to explain the shortcomings which they had discovered in the administration and policy of the state" in the years they were being trained to serve it. In Atatürk's recollection of that initial foray into high political ideas, he recalls their awareness that what they were doing was prohibited by the existing regime:

Political ideas came to be discussed during the years I spent in the War College. We did not at first have a clear perception of how things stood. It was the time of Sultan Abdülhamit. We used to read the books of Namik Kemal. We were closely followed. Generally, we could read only in the dormitories, after going to bed. The fact that readers of such patriotic works were persecuted, gave us the feeling that there was something rotten

¹⁰⁹² Quoted in Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 161.

¹⁰⁹³ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 127.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Andrew Mango, *Atatürk*. (New York: The Overlook Press, 1999). 48.

in the affairs of state. But we could not determine clearly what was wrong.¹⁰⁹⁵

In the years between his time at the War College and his rise to prominence at the end of World War I, Mustafa Kemal worked to advance his knowledge of European political thought. As one historian sums up, “He learned French and devoured the works of Voltaire and Rousseau, together with translations of Thomas Hobbes and John Stuart Mill.”¹⁰⁹⁶ These later revolutionaries understood that building a state that could exist comfortably on the borders of Europe mandated more than simply adopting Europe’s administrative techniques and ways of war. As Andrew Mango has noted, while the military elite “had become enlightened, the mass of Muslims, who in spite of the reforms, still constituted the ruling community, maintained in their illiteracy the habits of the pre-modern age.”¹⁰⁹⁷ For Atatürk, modernization would require the deliberate abandonment of Islam as sole organizing principle of the regime. Though they did not put it in precisely these terms, the Young Turks seem to have sensed what Noah Feldman has recently pointed out: their predecessors, the earliest modernizing reformers, had inadvertently made the political situation in the Empire worse. The codification of civil law in the latter half of the nineteenth century – a reform inspired by European legal codes – had all but backfired, destroying the one authority in the Empire that had until that point effectively restrained the executive: the *ulema*.¹⁰⁹⁸

¹⁰⁹⁵ Andrew Mango, *Atatürk*. (New York: The Overlook Press, 1999). 48-51.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent & Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds*, 38.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Andrew Mango, *Atatürk*. (New York: The Overlook Press, 1999). 7.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Noah Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State*, 40.

Prior to the reforms, religious scholars had been the keepers and interpreters of *sharia*, what conveyed an important power with which they were able to check, or at least restrain, the Sultan. That authority was marginalized by reforms designed to improve the rule of law by standardizing its application. Far from restraining the Sultan, then, early legal and constitutional reforms instead “displaced and destroyed the scholarly class, without leaving in their wake any institution or social entity capable of counterbalancing the executive as the scholarly class had once done.” Put another way, the codification on earth of laws sanctioned by God had the practical effect of unifying sword and high priest by very quickly eroding the dependence of the Sultan upon a separate authority when it came to interpreting Islamic law. Feldman goes on to argue that this move opened, throughout the Sunni world, both “the possibility of secular government” while simultaneously eroding “the one meaningful check on executive authority.”¹⁰⁹⁹ Thus, early modernizing reforms in the Ottoman Empire – undertaken in the name of economic and military necessity – effectively cleared the way for the totalitarian Arab regimes carved from the Ottoman Empire after WWI.

While Feldman suggests the revival of a scholarly class drawing its authority from its guardianship of Islam may be the best solution to the Arab world’s political difficulties today, Atatürk proposed a very different remedy for Turkey. He agrees that establishing a balance between at least two powers is essential to durable constitutional government; but he denied that Islam could play a constructive role in establishing such a balance. He recognized what early reformers who focused on laws alone did not. Statecraft is, first

¹⁰⁹⁹ Noah Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State*, 60-61.

and foremost, *soulcraft*. As Atatürk well understood, Turkey's revolution could not have been made durable simply by purging those loyal to the *ancien regime* and by subsequently adopting the outward trappings of constitutional government; nor could the Turkey simply reestablish a salutary division by rehabilitating a scholarly class drawing authority from Islam. Modern government required that at least one pole of the new regime be animated by modern ideas. In the short term, there was a single candidate for the role: the military. Far from attempting to graft a modern regime onto a people that was in decisive respects pre-modern in their opinions and habits, those responsible for the emergence of modern Turkey sought to empower a cadre of modernists in the short term, and to rip Turkey from the Islamic world (if necessarily incompletely) over the long term. Atatürk's self-conscious goal was to found a new nation on the basis of modern constitutional ideals.

Atatürk's Grand Ambitions

Mustafa Kemal articulated this ambition, and viewed it as the military's responsibility to transform Turkey, as early as 1912 while he was still a relatively unimportant member of the reform movement. Speaking to a German officer in the Ottoman service a few short years before WWI would catapult him to a world-historical role, he explained that the "Turkish army will have done its duty when it defends the country from foreign aggression and frees the nation from fanaticism and intellectual slavery," to which he added the observation that the "Turkish nation has fallen far behind the West. The main

aim should be to lead it to modern civilization.”¹¹⁰⁰ As Schacht points out in his classic study of Islamic law, “Modernist legislation does not, generally speaking, arise out of a genuine public demand.”¹¹⁰¹ It appears, rather, when modernizers moved by a liberal or humanist spirit—oftentimes lawyers, military officers, and bureaucrats who had been schooled in the ways of the West—gain real influence over government.^{1102 1103} Atatürk appears to have understood that lawgivers of the highest order manage somehow to bring out what is best in their people while setting for the state a course that will permit its betterment over time.

¹¹⁰⁰ Andrew Mango, *Atatürk*, 95; cf., Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent & Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds*, 38.

¹¹⁰¹ Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law*, 105.

¹¹⁰² cf., Joseph Shacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law*, 90.

¹¹⁰³ There is a second model not applicable to the Arab world. Indonesia is today the world’s largest Muslim country by population; it is also the world’s second largest democracy. This is due primarily to the fact that Islamic practice in Southeast Asia scarcely resembles its practice in the Arab world. The prevalent manner of interpretation and practice is, Indonesia again reveals, of much greater political consequence than the words on the page. There are a number of reasons for Indonesia’s religious moderation and its consequent success as a democracy. Few Indonesians speak Arabic, the principle language of those who have successfully radicalized the practice of Islam in the Arab world over the course of the twentieth century. Moreover, many Indonesians are *abangan*, or non-practicing; the majority consider themselves traditionalist but incorporate “strong elements of Sufi mysticism,” which has been described as “the inner-world variant of Islam that stresses emotive and personal experience of the divine” as opposed to a domineering insistence on literal interpretation and instantiation of Islamic law (RAND, *The Muslim World After 9/11*, 370, 22). Perhaps most important, Islam’s spread from Arabia to Southeast Asia left in tact local customs, and a tremendous variations in local customs, many of them dating to the pre-Islamic period; this had the natural effect of further diluting or moderating Islamic practice in fact. As a recent RAND study of the Middle East World after 9/11 explains, Indonesian traditionalists themselves “argue that the success of Islam in Indonesia from the fourteenth century onward had to do with the willingness to adapt to local customs, and they sometimes will admit that contemporary practices owe something to pre-Islamic traditions” (RAND, 370). This willingness to tolerate habits, and even laws, not derived from a strict reading of Islam’s sacred texts differentiates Indonesian Islam from Arab fundamentalists in most important respects. Whereas the Arab radicals insist that literal adherence to Islamic law *requires* the overthrow of insufficiently strict rulers and the expulsion of infidels, Indonesian traditionalists cite the hadith in which Mohammed councils the toleration of an unjust ruler to justify a moderate and inclusive approach to religious practice in the country (RAND, 21). The same verses once permitted the flexible interpretation of Islamic law that permitted the kind of division of authority between temporal rulers and religious scholar noted by Feldman, Lewis, and Schacht.

As leader of modern Turkey, Atatürk worked to bring about his modernizing vision. In a remarkable speech delivered in August of 1925, he explains how he conceived of the undertaking he finally was bringing to port. Constitutional reform would be ephemeral if habits of mind and guiding political ideals were not also transformed:

... the aim of the revolutions which we have been and are now accomplishing is to bring the people of the Turkish Republic into a state of society entirely modern and completely civilized in spirit and form. This is the central pillar of our Revolution, and it is necessary utterly to defeat those mentalities incapable of accepting this truth. Hitherto there have been many of this mentality, rusting and deadening the mind of the nation. In any case, the superstitions dwelling in people's minds will be completely driven out, for as long as they are not expelled, it will not be possible to bring the light of truth into men's minds.¹¹⁰⁴

But it was not sufficient to drive out “the superstitions dwelling in people’s minds.” New opinions, opinions that would sustain constitutional government, would have to be made to replace Turks’ traditional beliefs. One detects in Atatürk’s approach shades of Lincoln’s 1858 observation that “public sentiment is everything.” He well understood that sacred opinions, habits of heart and mind, guiding ideals—whatever one calls them, ideas internalized by the population animate political regimes. Thus, the job of a statesman is not simply to defend the political community or to direct its energies in prudent pursuit of some common good; above all, perhaps, the principles that ennoble the regime must be preserved and buttressed in the minds of the citizens who direct its affairs, not only by the deeds of great men but also by their words.

Was Turkey ready for modern constitutional government? Had an appropriate political character spread thoroughly enough? Or can Rousseau’s criticism of Peter the Great –

¹¹⁰⁴ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 410.

that he tried to make Russians European when he ought to have begun by making them Russians – apply equally to Atatürk? Turkey’s Constitutional regime remains fragile. But in seizing the opportunity presented by WWI to promulgate new sacred opinions, and by providing for a mixed government in the interim, Atatürk demonstrated key features of statesmanship: a commitment to worthy ideals, a plan to promote them that appropriately calibrated means to ends, and an appreciation that they would not instantly take ubiquitous hold.

In the first place, he recognized that World War I, a tragedy for the Ottoman Empire, was at the same time the great opportunity for Turkey’s modern reinvention. By undermining the authority of the old guard, by shaking the Empire to the core and demolishing the order that had existed, an out of the ashes re-founding of the country seemed to be possible. Rousseau’s discussion of the prerequisites of the promulgation of new modes and orders suggests Atatürk had good reason to be optimistic:

There are indeed times in the history of States when, just as some kinds of illness turn men's heads and make them forget the past, periods of violence and revolutions do to peoples what these crises do to individuals: horror of the past takes the place of forgetfulness, and the State, set on fire by civil wars, is born again, so to speak, from its ashes, and takes on anew, fresh from the jaws of death, the vigor of youth.¹¹⁰⁵

WWI not only helped Turks to forget their past. The Empire had been dismembered, the Treaty of Sevres even allocating parts of the Anatolian heartland to Armenia and Greece. Atatürk led the Turkish War of Independence, winning back important territories from bitter rivals. In the end, the wars left standing, amidst so much rubble, a

¹¹⁰⁵ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, II.8.

single accomplished general positioned to become a national hero. Military failures had swept the old regime away. Atatürk took the opportunity to attend to Turkey's constitution and its legal code; but he devoted more attention to the long task of reshaping the laws "graven in the hearts of the citizens... on which the success of all the others depends." We have said already that earlier influences—of Namik Kemal in particular—helped to redefine concepts like freedom and equality along Western lines. Thinkers had also offered an interpretation of Islam compatible with constitutional government. But the impact of those ideas had been, almost exclusively, confined to the country's elite. Atatürk, leveraging unmatched popularity and a monopoly on political power in what was effectively a one-party state, took further steps to disseminate more widely these and other modern opinions in the years following the revolution. As Kinzer and others have noted, while liberal constitutionalism was and remains the express goal, "[t]he new nation that Atatürk built on the rubble of the Ottoman Empire never could have been built democratically. Probably not a single one of his sweeping reforms would have been approved in a plebiscite."¹¹⁰⁶

Illiberal Means for Constitutional Ends

That new modes and orders cannot be founded while adhering to the standards and manners of public conduct which the new order seeks to establish and defend is a fact long recognized by political theorists. Here again, Atatürk understood what the architects

¹¹⁰⁶ Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent & Star*. 10.

of the Iraq war did not: a liberal democracy cannot always be built exclusively by liberal and democratic means. In order that Turkey would one day join the ranks of independent, modern, republics, Atatürk took the following undemocratic—some have said totalitarian—measures against tremendous domestic resistance. Historians agree they were, for the most part necessary. One has gone so far as to speculate about Turkey’s fate had Atatürk’s reforms not taken hold. “It is frightening to imagine,” Kinzer remarks, “what Turkey would look like today without the influence of its army. Quite possibly it would be somnolent and isolated, like Syria, Iraq, and other Middle Eastern countries where democracy and individual rights are concepts about which citizens dare not even dream.”¹¹⁰⁷

- Resisting domestic pressure to rebuild the Empire, Atatürk accepted the European state system, even Turkey’s reduction to greater Anatolia, where he sought to build a new Turkish nationalism. The terrible wars with the Greeks and Armenians helped to forge the invisible ties of affection that bind modern Turks to one another, this in the place of Islamic and Ottoman identities. Scholars have noted that the concept of the modern nation-state fit uneasily in the Islamic world. Ali Allawi notes that “there was no word in any of the languages of Islam that would parallel the meanings of ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism,’” later adding that Mustafa’s Kemal’s “Turkish experiment” would not be “duplicated in such

¹¹⁰⁷ Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent & Star*. 17.

sweeping and determined terms in other Muslim countries” in part for lack of a single common identity.¹¹⁰⁸

- To strengthen this new national consciousness, Atatürk took measures that strike modern sensibilities as extreme. Most important, perhaps, a new history was written, designed to separate Turks from their Ottoman, and especially their Islamic, past. M. Suktu Hanioglu, a recent biographer, draws attention to a high-school textbook prepared under the supervision of Atatürk himself. Therein, one finds this remarkable passage:

The Turks, too, had been a great nation before accepting the religion of the Arabs... [The] Arab religion... loosened the national ties of the Turkish nation [and] benumbed national feelings and enthusiasm for the nation, because the aim of the religion established by Muhammad prompted an Arab nationalist policy... Those who accepted Muhammad's religion had to suppress their identities and devote their lives to the exaltation of the name of Allah everywhere.... Under these circumstances, the Turkish nation resembled those who commit the Qur'an to memory without understanding the meaning of a single word of it and thus become senile.¹¹⁰⁹

The new history books emphasized Turkish brotherhood, an affinity that had thitherto been subordinate in importance to religious and imperial affinities.

Noble myths emphasizing Turkey's pre-Islamic past were created, and a history divorced from Islam of which Turks could be was made an integral part of the secular grade school curriculum. Atatürk—never a devout Muslim—might well have understood that while European Christianity had (for the most part) supported the emergence of the nation state by giving cohesion to the peoples in

¹¹⁰⁸ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, 47-48.

¹¹⁰⁹ M. Suktu Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 132.

the North Atlantic states, Islam is much less conducive to nationalism and patriotism in the modern world.

The *umma* is a community of believers united across ethnicities irrespective of state boundaries; to the extent Muslims believe it important to establish laws that will govern the entire community according to revealed precepts, the unifying power of Islam is corrosive to national identities to the extent state boundaries fail to match up with the geographic bounds of the *umma*. As Mango notes, whereas the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Churches “had become by the end of the nineteenth century bearers of their respective national ideologies” (a list to which one could add the Catholic Church in Poland after the Cold War), Islamic affinities more often tear against the establishment of powerful national affinities.¹¹¹⁰

- To durably implant this new identity, Atatürk changed the alphabet—even the way the Turkish language sounds (in an effort to purge Turkish of Arabic and Persian words)—as part of a deliberate attempt to make it difficult for later generations to connect with their pre-Turkish past. As a result, the majority of Turks today cannot read the words of the poets, theologians and philosophers who predate their Constitutional republic. Atatürk even banned the translation of certain words into Turkish. Among them: the philosophy of Al-Ghazali.¹¹¹¹ He was censored because of the role his defense of revelation played in closing the Islamic world to Hellenic thought and banishing man’s use of his own reason.

¹¹¹⁰ Andrew Mango, *Atatürk*, 13.

¹¹¹¹ Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 128.

The abandonment of the Arabic script in favor of the Latin alphabet (with slight modifications) was, moreover, a highly symbolic gesture; it symbolized a deliberate severance from the East in favor of the West. On Atatürk's explanation,

We must free ourselves from these incomprehensible signs which for centuries have held our minds in an iron vice... Our nation will show, with its script and with its mind, that its place is with the civilized world.¹¹¹²

- Islamic modes of dress were prohibited—first the turban, then the fez, ultimately the veil—in a deliberate attempt to transform the character of society. Atatürk understood that the relinquishing of highly symbolic cultural artifacts could help to create a distance between Turks and their Ottoman-Islamic past. He understood that the fez – designed to recall a prayer mat, its tassel symbolizing the prospect of escape to an otherworldly fatherland – was “an emblem of ignorance, negligence, fanaticism, and hatred of progress and civilization.”¹¹¹³ The significance of such highly symbolic – and to many, highly offensive – actions resonated in Turkey and beyond.
- The Sultanate, and shortly thereafter, the Caliphate, was abolished in favor of Republican institutions, and Islam, officially disestablished as the state religion. The careful supervision of Islam on a mosque-by-mosque basis was enshrined in law while dervish brotherhoods and Sufi orders—long the focal point of popular Islamic practice—were dissolved and their prayer meetings banned.¹¹¹⁴ The state

¹¹¹² Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent & Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds*, 45.

¹¹¹³ Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent & Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds*, 44.

¹¹¹⁴ RAND, *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*. 2008, 3.

supported religious reforms intended to personalize the practice of Islam in Turkey. Noting that Charles Sherrill, the U.S. ambassador to Turkey at the time, was “not far off the mark” when he compared Atatürk to Luther, M. Suktu Hanioglu helpfully situates the thrust of Atatürk’s religious reforms in the context of the Resurgence of Islam:

The main idea behind this initiative was that a religious reform program similar to that of the Protestant reformation of the sixteenth century would prompt a Turkish renaissance in the twentieth century. Thus, unlike puritanical Muslim movements such as Wahhabism and Salafism, which proposed a return to the original sources of Islam in order to create a new orthodoxy, Mustafa Kemal wished to reinterpret the Muslim tradition so as to facilitate a Turkish renaissance.¹¹¹⁵

Last, it must be emphasized that Turkey is not a democracy in the narrow sense of the term. Atatürk did not intend it to be. In his cognizance that the extent of Turkey’s political reform would be limited by the people’s character – which would not be transformed overnight – one finds a final demonstration of his political genius. He built a mixed regime in the hope Turks’ sacred opinions would, in time, evolve in such a way as to support increasingly representative regime that would nonetheless remain liberal and limited. In the meantime, Turkey’s constitution divided authority between the people and a secular, pro-Western, and necessarily unelected elite tasked with refining and ennobling the public view. If the tension between the people and Turkey’s unelected military officials keep the country freer than its Arab neighbors, it is the unelected establishment that exerts the liberalizing influence.

¹¹¹⁵ M. Suktu Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011), 153.

The most controversial institutional elements of the Turkish political regime from a purely democratic perspective—the military’s overwhelming political influence, the constitutional court’s jealous protection of the Kemalist constitution’s secular features, and the *diyanet* or Directorate of Religious Affairs (a body that appoints imams to Turkey’s mosques and sometimes writes their sermons)—are simultaneously those that have to this point sustained modern and moderate government in Turkey. To wit, the unelected elite has not infrequently found it necessary to limit the freedom to worship, censor religious expression, prohibit open discussion of dangerous political ideas, disqualify Islamist political parties, overturn statutes inspired by Islamic law, and otherwise prohibit the intermingling of religion and politics by distinctly anti-democratic means; three times, an elected government has been deposed—all of it, *for the sake of order and secular constitutional government*. Andrew Mango has gone to far as to assert that military constituted both “the vanguard of modernization” even as it perpetuated some of the “authoritarian traditions of the Ottoman state.” Thanks to the Atatürk’s regime, in 2004 Mango was optimistic about Turkey’s future: “It is because the order which he established has largely held, that the Turks can now embrace democracy, as the new secular, universal religion.”¹¹¹⁶

Stephen Kinzer invoked a Turkish diplomat to make a similar point in his recent work, *Crescent and Star*. Discussing the requisites of liberal constitutionalism in Turkey in the context of the longer experience of the North Atlantic states, the unnamed diplomat explained Turkey’s path in these terms:

¹¹¹⁶ Andrew Mango, *The Turks Today*, 24.

You in the West also had long periods of backwardness and intolerance... You had dictatorships, civil wars, religious fanaticism, the Inquisition, all kinds of horror. Then, over a period of centuries, you climbed out of that hole. You had the Enlightenment. You had philosophers who wrote books about democracy. Very slowly, people started to understand and accept these new ideas. You began to have governments based on democratic principles. Now, because you went through all of that, you can give your people complete freedom. Your societies are stable enough to handle it. But it's not the same here. Our Enlightenment began only seventy-five years ago. It's too soon to lift every restriction. The risk is too great. We could lose everything.¹¹¹⁷

The Resurgence of Islam Tests Atatürk's Regime

The resurgence and radicalization of Islam apparent across the Islamic world today is testing Turkey's mixed regime. Until recently, scholars tended to agree that "the debate between secularists and Islamic groups" in Turkey was basically resolved in the late 1990s "when the political discourse of mainstream Islamic groups embraced secularism."¹¹¹⁸ Recent events have changed that. Popular support for Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its populist Prime Minister, Recep Erdogan, is strong. While the AKP is a moderate Islamist organization as judged by its domestic priorities, the party and its leadership sprung from the more assertive Refah Party, which was disbanded in 1997 for violating the Republic's secular principles. First elected in 2002, the AKP was reelected in 2007 and 2011 with strong parliamentary majorities. Their control of the legislative branch permitted the AKP to elevate a new president in 2008; Erdogan's choice,

¹¹¹⁷ Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent & Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds*, 18.

¹¹¹⁸ Kuru, 140.

Abdullah Gul, shares his assertive Islamist past.¹¹¹⁹ While the AKP's share of the popular vote has increased in each election, its parliamentary majority has consistently fallen short (though only narrowly so) of the super-majority required to amend the country's constitution, which is widely believed to be one of Erdogan's top priorities. His ambition is to consolidate executive authority in a president, an office to which he would almost surely be elected.¹¹²⁰

In the meantime, the AKP has nonetheless managed to enact a number of reforms with the same aim within the present constitutional arrangement. Control of the presidency has allowed the AKP to alter the make-up of the Constitutional Court, an institution that has, since its inception, frustrated the aspirations of Islamists in Parliament (by voiding insufficiently secular laws or by banning their political parties altogether). The AKP has also managed to transform the military's position in the regime (ostensibly to assert civilian command over the armed forces), to gain control over Turkey's police and intelligence apparatuses, and to place party allies in high-ranking positions of Turkey's powerful bureaucracy—all (heretofore) important constituents of the mini-state established to guard Atatürk's secular republic. Erdogan has also used the government to target the press, harassing and cracking down on independent journalists with increasing frequency, especially those who have reported on the state's prosecution of military leaders. Most ominously, political trials of top-ranking officers (at least 300 in all including more than 40 generals) led Turkey's top military commander and the heads of

¹¹¹⁹ RAND, *The Muslim World After 9/11*, 188.

¹¹²⁰ Berk Esen and Sinan Ciddi, "Turkey's 2011 Elections: An Emerging Dominant Party System?" *Mideast Review of International Affairs*, October 2011.

the navy, army, and air force to resign in protest in July, 2011.¹¹²¹ The event may turn out to symbolize a sea-change in Turkish politics: the military, long the most important bastion of Atatürk's brand of republicanism, found itself, for the first time since Turkey's modern emergence, incapable of deflecting or overcoming attacks by a political branch controlled by a popular Islamist party. It is not too much to say that the character of Turkey's mixed regime has been transformed in the space of a decade—the unelected Kemalists who once checked the elected branch replaced with allies of the governing AKP, and the counter-majoritarian institutions they long controlled, captured or neutered.

A failure to understand that political liberalism and democratic institutions are different things entirely abetted these developments. Somewhat perversely, international pressure to domestic democratizing reforms led, in practice, to the empowerment of the country's least liberal elements.¹¹²² The AKP has publicly favored, and continues to support, joining the European Union (even though Turkey's chances have been dashed by the recent turn against multiculturalism throughout Western Europe, to say nothing of the Euro's present troubles); their enthusiasm is clearly driven by ulterior motives. E.U. guidelines mandating democratic reform, in particular the reduction of the military's power, were used by the AKP as powerful pretexts quietly to consolidate power; the

¹¹²¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/30/world/europe/30turkey.html?pagewanted=all>

¹¹²² Zenyo Baran, a prominent Turkey expert, noted in *Foreign Affairs* that Turkey “is becoming increasingly vulnerable to domestic Islamic extremists, partly because some of the measures traditionally used to keep radicals in check are being abolished”—this, to conform to the E.U.'s naïve conception of what a democracy should look like (*Foreign Affairs*, “Fighting the War of Ideas,” Nov/Dec., 2005). RAND analysts noted that the AKP party “has come to view the West, especially the E.U., as an important ally in its struggle against the restrictions of the Kemalist state” (RAND, *The Muslim World After 9/11*, 47, 69.)

prospect of E.U. membership appeased and excited liberals who ought to have been alarmed. If actions speak louder than words, it is surely significant that Erdogan has focused his diplomatic efforts on increasing Turkey's considerable influence in the Middle East, while he adopted a rhetoric romanticizing the virtues of European integration. The irony for Europeans: it is precisely the undemocratic constitutional features of Turkey's regime that helped, for six decades, to secure Turkey's orientation toward the West. The very counter-majoritarian features of the regime the good democrats of Europe scoffed at were exactly those that had moderated Islamist aspirations in parliament by erecting relatively clear limits beyond which elected governments had not been permitted to press. Michael Rubin is right to condemn Brussels on this point: "By failing to encourage the creation of an alternate check-and-balance mechanism to replace the military's traditional role as guardian of the constitution... the E.U. committed diplomatic malpractice. Erdogan seized the opportunity and ran roughshod over Turkish secularism and democracy."¹¹²³

The foreign policy consequences of the AKP's decade in power are no more encouraging than its domestic reforms. Turkey has drifted further from the U.S., first and most dramatically evidenced by Ankara's refusal to allow American ground troops to invade Iraq from the North through Turkey in 2003. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Erdogan has embraced Iran, a country with which Turkey shares numerous security and economic

¹¹²³ Michael Rubin, "The Case Against Turkey's Ruling Party," *The American*, June 20, 2008. <http://www.meforum.org/1924/the-case-against-turkeys-ruling-party>

interests.¹¹²⁴ The Turks' enthusiastic reception of President Ahmadinejad in 2008 further raised alarms (Prime Minister Erdogan called him a "friend" and dismissed concerns about the Iranian nuclear problem as "gossip").¹¹²⁵ Meanwhile, Turkey's relationship with Israel is badly frayed and worsening thanks, at least in part, to Erdogan's proclivity for bellicose anti-Israeli rhetoric. Add to this Turkey's public insistence that Hamas be involved in the peace process, as well as its support for Hezbollah and other organizations with terrorist wings, and it is difficult to imagine Turkey's relationship with Israel will improve in the short term.¹¹²⁶ There is also a strategic calculation. As International Crisis Group notes, Turkey "perceives a diminished need for close ties to Israel" in part because it has concluded that Israeli intransigence on the Palestinian issue is "keeping the region on edge," which frustrates Turkey's overriding interest in regional stability.¹¹²⁷ (In part, Erdogan appears to be emotionally attached to the situation of the Palestinians.)¹¹²⁸ By distancing itself from Israel amidst so much uncertainty—Egypt's revolution may bring deteriorated relations with that neighbor; there is not telling what Syria's unrest might portend—Turkey may hope to pressure Israel into a settlement with the Palestinian Authority on terms fairly favorable to Palestinians. Ankara has actively sought to improve relations with Sudan and Syria (until it became impossible to support Assad's

¹¹²⁴ Iran supplies Turkey with one-fifth of its natural gas. The countries also have a developed trade relationship, Turkey serving as the road Westward for Iranians exports. On the security side, both countries have an interest in containing Kurdish separatists. With respect to Iran's nuclear program, Turkey remains Iran's best diplomatic conduit to the West. ICG, "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," 7 April, 2010, 16-17; and "Turkey's Crises Over Israel and Iran," 8 September, 2010, 11-12.

¹¹²⁵ International Crisis Group, "Turkey's Crises Over Israel and Iran," 21

¹¹²⁶ Ehud Toledano, "AKP's New Turkey" *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 11, 52; International Crisis Group, "Turkey and the Middle East," 18-19

¹¹²⁷ International Crisis Group, "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," 24.

¹¹²⁸ International Crisis Group. "Turkey's Crises Over Israel and Iran."

brutal crackdown on revolutionaries), while writing off Mubarak's Egypt, a key American ally until the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Whatever the implications for the Turks domestically, it is probable that a more democratic Turkey, freed from the guidance of the Europhile military and administrative elite, will continue (slowly) to drift away from the U.S. and Europe in the realm of international relations.

Taken together with its transformative domestic reforms, it is not hard to understand why the "AKP's second term in office has given more momentum as well as credence to fears over the party's real motivations," and even "fueled suspicions of an AKP 'deep plan' to install an Islamic dictatorship."¹¹²⁹ Versions of this concern are widespread, not to say ubiquitous, among policymakers and analysts in America, Europe, and even among Turks themselves.¹¹³⁰ A former Bush administration official cautions that at bottom, Turkish Islamists are "more in tune with the fanatically anti-Western principles of Saudi Wahhabi Islam" than the old Ottoman Islam.¹¹³¹ Steven Cook, an American Turkey specialist, worries that "after six decades of strategic cooperation, Turkey and the United States are becoming strategic competitors—especially in the Middle East."¹¹³² At home, Prime Minister Erdogan has lost the support of Turkish liberals in the media and the academy, who fear the AKP is "transforming Turkey's political culture from one based on Western democratic values into one based on an Islamic/conservative approach," while risking alienation from the West by its increasingly pro-Arab and pro-Iranian foreign

¹¹²⁹ Ehud Toledano, "AKP's New Turkey" 45-45.

¹¹³⁰ International Crisis Group. "Turkey's Crises Over Israel and Iran," 18-19.

¹¹³¹ International Crisis Group. "Turkey's Crises Over Israel and Iran," 18

¹¹³² Steven A. Cook, "How do you Say 'Frenemy' in Turkish?" *Foreign Policy*. June 1, 2010. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/01/how_do_you_say_frenemy_in_Turkish

policy.¹¹³³ Some Arab Islamists believe (or hope) that they detect in the AKP the “initial stages of a long-term ‘stealth’ project whose purpose is to reclaim Turkish society and bring it back to Islam.”¹¹³⁴ As Ehud Toledano sums up,

Many fear that AKP seeks to turn Turkey into an Islamic state and to sweep aside in the process the Kemalist legacy and its secular public sphere. These fears include the Islamization of the education system and the creeping imposition of a host of restrictions on public behavior, such as women’s dress, the mixing of men and women in entertainment areas, consumption of alcohol, and the loss of other freedoms associated with a modern, liberal, and Western way of life. Others worry about what appears to be the Erdogan government’s increasing assault on journalists who reported on the *Ergenekon* trials without necessarily toeing the AKP’s line.¹¹³⁵

Those who reject this interpretation point to the AKP’s impressive accomplishments in the economic sphere. Turkey has sustained impressive growth over the course of the last decade, inflation is under control, and direct foreign investment has exploded; as a consequence, living standards have improved considerably.¹¹³⁶ Moreover, the AKP has spearheaded efforts to improve the government’s relationship with Turkey’s ethnic and religious minorities, including the disaffected Kurdish population in the East. Although the “opening” policy probably has as much to do with increasing the space for Islamic worship among Turkish Muslims, more generous religious freedoms and increased cultural autonomy have been extended to other minority groups as well.¹¹³⁷ The AKP has even devoted considerable resources to economic development in Kurdish-majority areas of the country. Taken together, the initiatives have yielded electoral gains for the

¹¹³³ International Crisis Group, “Turkey’s Crises Over Israel and Iran,” 21-22.

¹¹³⁴ Hassan, Mneimneh, “‘The Turkish Model’ in Arab Islamism: Rejection of Emulation?” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 11, 12.

¹¹³⁵ Ehud Toledano, “AKP’s New Turkey,” 45-45.

¹¹³⁶ International Crisis Group, “Turkey’s Crises Over Israel and Iran,” 1.

¹¹³⁷ Ehud Toledano, “AKP’s New Turkey,” 47.

AKP among factions long ignored by Turkey's ruling elite.¹¹³⁸ In the context of a decade of relative calm, and especially the AKP's deliberate steps toward deeper integration with Europe, it is not hard to understand why commentators have frequently suggested that the AKP might serve as a kind of modern and moderate model for Islamist groups elsewhere in the Middle East.¹¹³⁹ On this account, improved relations with Syria and Iran are nothing more than the consequence of shared interests, and Turkey's overriding desire to see its region achieve some measure of stability and economic integration. If elections in Iraq, Gaza, Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere were to yield comparatively restrained ruling factions, anxieties about the potentially illiberal consequences of democratization in the Middle East would, indeed, be relieved to a very considerable extent.

And yet, as Hillel Fradkin has intimated, the evidence in favor of the Islamist drift explanation is uncomfortably compelling. Even before the resignation of Turkey's military leadership in the summer of 2011, he contended that the AKP's exercise of power had confirmed more fears than it had realized hopes.¹¹⁴⁰ Far from exemplifying a moderate species of political Islam more or less hospitable to Western concerns and interests, the AKP's patient and gradualist approach—especially its embrace of democratic institutions and populist rhetoric to empower its allies and marginalize its opponents—might instead be taken as a successful model of Islamizing regime change.

¹¹³⁸ Ehud Toledano, "AKP's New Turkey," 48.

¹¹³⁹ Hillel Fradkin, "The New Crescent Moon in the Islamist Firmament," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 11, 6.

¹¹⁴⁰ Hillel Fradkin, "The New Crescent Moon in the Islamist Firmament," 7.

To the extent that AKP continues toward autocracy and inspires other Islamic parties elsewhere, it may indeed become an example for Islamist politics—albeit a model of how to democratically acquire power and then corrupt democratic principles, institutions, and practices for anti-democratic purposes.¹¹⁴¹

Indeed, Islamist parties seem increasingly to be employing the rhetoric of participatory democracy as a kind of cudgel by which to achieve their political objectives. The AKP played the E.U. masterfully to unburden itself of so many of the old Kemalist restraints. Erdogan has since demanded that Hamas be given a seat at the negotiating table on the Israel-Palestine issue on expressly democratic grounds: after all, Gaza *elected* Hamas to *represent* its interests in free and fair elections. New electoral opportunities have grown out of the Arab Spring. The Muslim Brotherhood embraced the opportunity to participate in Egypt's elections, overcoming whatever lingering theological reservations they may have had about legitimizing the state system imposed by the North Atlantic powers. Enthusiastic participation by Islamist parties in the Egyptian and Tunisian elections, some more radical than the Muslim Brotherhood, catapulted factions intent to inject Islam into politics to positions of legislative dominance. Thus, a familiar dynamic is likely to assert itself in new ways and places as countries in the Middle East adopt democratic institutions and practices: the countries affected by the Arab Spring will, like Turkey, drift further from the U.S. while their domestic policies grow, if not increasingly illiberal, illiberal in different ways. (Members of the Muslim Brotherhood and more radical adherents to Salafi strains of Islamism will surely fare better; Christians and women may not.) Many Westerners, among them not a few foreign policy thinkers—all good democrats who confuse democracy with political liberalism—will be perplexed and troubled by this. And

¹¹⁴¹ Hillel Fradkin, "The New Crescent Moon in the Islamist Firmament," 7.

they will remain so—which is to say America’s Mideast foreign policy will remain confused—as long as they continue to misunderstand the character of their own *liberal* regimes and to ignore the aims and impact of the Islamic Resurgence.

CONCLUSION

Optimists are fond of explaining that democratic responsibility will moderate Islamist parties catapulted to power by the Arab Spring. They point to the AKP as a model for the Muslim Brotherhood's political wings in Egypt and Jordan, and even for Hamas in Gaza, as though the AKP's political success in Turkey will encourage the Brotherhood to adopt a similarly restrained species of politicized Islam elsewhere. This hope reflects a misunderstanding of the origin of the AKP's relative moderation. The hard fought (and incomplete) ideational transformation in Turkey accomplished over the course of generations aimed at the very antithesis of the Brotherhood's proselytizing efforts throughout the Middle East and beyond. Even today, while strong pluralities support Prime Minister Erdogan's policies in Turkey, overwhelming majorities revere Atatürk and believe the secular nature of the republic should be maintained.¹¹⁴² Not democracy, then, but institutions and reforms designed to check and transform popular opinion yielded modern Turkey and its moderate brand of Islamism. Faced with a predicament similar to that the Turks faced at the end of WWI, however, much the Arab World has moved in the opposite direction. Amidst the abysmal failures of socialism and Arab nationalism, it is not terribly surprising that large numbers embraced radical and politicized species of Islam rather than modernist alternatives. As a result of those failures, moreover, few majority-Muslim countries have anything resembling the division of authority established by Turkey's constitution to such successful moderating effect.

¹¹⁴² A 2006 study of public opinion in Turkey found that 76% of the population oppose the implementation of *sharia* and fully 75% believe the president should be a "guardian of secularity." RAND, *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2008), 24.

Where such divisions do exist, Morocco and Kuwait for example, it is the dynastic rulers friendly to the West—and not democratic institutions—that exert modernizing and liberal influence over the regime.

What, then, are the lessons for those who would like to see modern and moderate regimes emerge from this era of revolution and upheaval? The first is that *ideas matter*. Where participatory institutions proliferate, the population's guiding opinions and *mores* will be reflected in the laws that are passed. For this reason, the ongoing intellectual battle between those who advocate politicized interpretations of Islam, and reformers like Abdolkarim Soroush, is exceedingly important. Majorities will be increasingly liberal in the way they utilize their legislative authority, and more tolerant in their capacity as private citizens, as spiritually plausible accounts mandating tolerance and neighborliness take hold. In the meantime, it is important to recognize that popular government can be successful even where religiously conservative interpretations of Islam predominate. It is one thing to demand that a political community's laws reflect the people's sacred beliefs in an order that includes protections for minorities that disagree with the majority; it is quite another to use the coercive authority of the government to instantiate God's laws as interpreted by a religious or scholarly elite, and to coerce that manner of observance with the state's security apparatus. Put another way, it would be foolish to expect Cairo to look like Amsterdam as a consequence of the Arab Spring. Nor is it necessarily desirable that states in the Middle East aspire to emulate the permissiveness of the North Atlantic democracies. There is a difference, in other words—a very important one—between conservative Muslims and politicized Islam.

Second, *democracy is not necessarily the answer*. What reformers long for—peace, domestic stability, limited government, minority protections, transparency and an end to corruption, etc.—are as much a consequence of political liberalism as they are traceable to free and fair elections. American interests in the region, similarly, are best served where strategically important regimes in the Mideast are animated by liberal principles. Elections do not create political liberalism. They are, rather, one important component of a functioning political regime. Where the people do not, themselves, inject liberal sensibilities into the state, other sources must be sought.

Third, it follows that *constitutions are important*—all the more where a people's experience with free political institutions is less mature. It is worth repeating that political bonds must be tightened where guiding commitments do not lead the majority to make moderate and restrained use of its authority and individuals freedoms. Establishing independent checks on the popular branch or branches—as Atatürk did—is indispensable to government that is durably limited and tolerably liberal. Where an established and independent center of political authority exists—be it military in nature or a family dynasty—it may be able to play an important role in a mixed constitutional order, especially when it commands the support of some important part of the political community, and where it is animated by liberal commitments. New regimes should not, then, aspire simply to represent the people as they conceive of their interests, but rather, to represent the public interest broadly construed. This often requires powerful *counter-majoritarian* provisions and institutions that are *not* dependent upon, or even directly accountable to, the people.

Fourth, *there is no substitute for statesmanship*. Western scholars and bureaucrats can no more craft a constitution that will last for an unwilling population than they can spread liberal commitments among a population hostile to the West. A constitutional order will endure—and operate as it is designed to—only to the extent those living under it, as well as those operating within it, revere it and bind themselves to its principles and limitations. Where a constitutional tradition dating back generations does not exist, it is up to the heroes who capture the imagination and admiration of a people to chart for them a new political path. Public affection for those glorified and celebrated by their political communities gives them the esteem required to affect a community's guiding opinions, and to successfully establish a new regime; their stature in the public mind is, as it were, transferred to their political legacy. Alien powers seeking to impose new institutions or ideas from outside or above will fail for lacking the necessary claim to the people's affections and loyalties.

Fifth, *U.S. foreign policy contributes* to the resonance of assertive strains of political Islam. The U.S. military presence in the Middle East, its long support for Arab dictators, drone strikes that can reach every corner and cave on earth, the perception that American support for Israel is unlimited and unconditional, the association of Iraq's democracy with its utter political dysfunction—all of it helps politicized interpretations of Islamic law gain traction. However legitimate or necessary from the perspective of U.S. interests, America's interventions in the Middle East arouse the very furor and indignation that incline proud men to embrace Islamist ideologies for the guidance and validation that is otherwise hard to come by.

Thus, however desirable, there is very little the West can do to encourage the spread of liberal democracy in the Islamic world in the short term. Certainly, it should not be America's grand strategy in the Middle East. But there are a number of little things that can be done, and in some cases, things policymakers can refrain from doing. Pressure to democratize should be united to equally forceful pressure to establish powerful independent and unelected checks on newly established participatory institutions. English language instruction as well as easy and unfettered access to the internet—everything that helps break the Islamist monopoly on education where they are strongest—can help abet a war of ideas that can only be won by domestic reformers. Young reformers can be supported—whether by organizing conferences on the principles of liberalism in the Middle East, or by increasing the number encouraged to study in the West (as both Abdolkarim Soroush and Namik Kemal did)—such that they can propose suitable amalgamations that may resonate in Muslim-majority countries. Support for social capacity-building NGOs—whether they aim to help establish a free press, educate administrators, develop local and municipal governing capacity, organize unions, or help establish independent local courts—can be increased. And military intervention in the Middle East should be tailored in as narrow a way as possible to meet U.S. security objectives in the region. When an Atatürk-like figure does emerge, policymakers in the West will have to recall that modern Turkey was not built overnight, and that Atatürk could not have succeeded by entirely democratic and liberal means.

Last, it is important to remember that the West—in particular, its unique and evolving species of political liberalism—is itself the consequence of a series of intellectual

revolutions and political events that have, by their totality, created an unusual, fragile, and evolving personality. That personality, blended with the national character and constitutional arrangement of the various North Atlantic states to different effect in certain particulars—has created the broadly similar regimes we know in the West, which have in turn secured for us the blessings of liberty, thanks to which so many worthwhile ways of living are possible. It is from the noblest of motivations, motivations stemming from the very same liberal personalities, that we want a similar way of life for strangers who live under oppressive political regimes—even those who share neither our origins, nor our traditions, nor even our principles. The willingness to sacrifice blood and treasure to help others enjoy the liberties we often taken for granted is doubly impressive. And yet, it would be folly to expect liberal democracy to spring up fully-grown in the Middle East. Absent an appreciation of the impediments standing in the way—and the character of those impediments—well-intentioned intervention will continue to yield outcomes that are prejudicial to U.S. interests, and very often, pernicious to political life in the countries affected.

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